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Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945–47

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Introduction

Ever since its beginning, organized dalit politics under the leadership of Dr B. R. Ambedkar had been consistently moving away from the Indian National Congress and the Gandhian politics of integration. It was drifting towards an assertion of separate political identity of its own, which in the end was enshrined formally in the new constitution of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, established in 1942. A textual discursive representation of this sense of alienation may be found in Ambedkar's book, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, published in 1945. Yet, within two years, in July 1947, we find Ambedkar accepting Congress nomination for a seat in the Constituent Assembly. A few months later he was inducted into the first Nehru Cabinet of free India, ostensibly on the basis of a recommendation from Gandhi himself. In January 1950, speaking at a general public meeting in Bombay, organized by the All India Scheduled Castes Federation, he advised the dalits to co-operate with the Congress and to think of their country first, before considering their sectarian interests. But then within a few months again, this alliance broke down over his differences with Congress stalwarts, who, among other things, refused to support him on the Hindu Code Bill. He resigned from the Cabinet in 1951 and in the subsequent general election in 1952, he was defeated in the Bombay parliamentary constituency by a political nonentity, whose only advantage was that he contested on a Congress ticket.[1] Ambedkar's chief election agent, Kamalakant Chitre described this electoral debacle as nothing but a 'crisis'.[2]

[1] For details, see M. S. Gore, *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, 1993), pp. 177–95.

[2] Unsigned letter (probably written by Kamalakant Chitre) to B. R. Ambedkar, 14 Jan. 1952, Dr B. R. Ambedkar Papers, National Archives of India [hereafter NAI].

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These developments obviously raise many questions. What did, in the first place, lead to the unexpected alliance of 1947, between Ambedkar and the Congress—an association that lasted less than four years and was shaky and vulnerable from the very beginning? And then, did this alliance have anything to do with the 'crisis' that Chitre talked about or was itself indicative of a 'crisis' of dalit politics?

Gail Omvedt has shown in her book, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, that the 'Brahman-bourgeois Congress' had been appropriating dalit politics during the last phase of colonial rule, and this was weakening Ambedkar's political base. But in her opinion, it was 'the final declaration of independence and partition [that] led him decisively to throw his lot with the Congress'. His decision 'to negotiate with the Congress' was based also on his 'preference for a strong and centralised state', as opposed to the 'extreme' federation being proposed by the Muslim League.[3] For Eleanor Zelliot, on the other hand, the alliance was a triumph of the Congress integrationist politics, a 'remarkable act of political generosity', through which '[a]ll the varying strains of Gandhi–Congress–Untouchable situation seemed to come together'.[4] M. S. Gore offers a smiliar, but a more instrumentalist explanation. With the Muslim question seemingly resolved, the Congress now sought to tackle the untouchability issue by co-opting its most articulate leader. For Ambedkar too, this offered an opportunity to do something for his community from within the government, and not in confrontation with the Congress; and the offer had no strings attached.[5] On the other extreme, Arun Shourie's recent iconoclastic exposé, *Worshipping False Gods*, seeks to explain this compromise in terms of a 'forget and forgive' policy of the Congress and depicts Ambedkar begging Jagjivan Ram for a cabinet position[6]—an insinuation which, as one of Shourie's numerous critics has pointed out, is either untrue or exaggeration.[7]

[3] Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, 1994), p. 304.

[4] Eleanor Zelliot, 'Congress and the Untouchables, 1917–1959', in Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert (eds), *Congress and Indian Nationalism* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 193–4; also see her *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 172–3.

[5] Gore, *The Social Context*, pp. 180–3.

[6] Arun Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods: Ambedkar, and the Facts Which Have Been Erased* (New Delhi, 1997), pp. 55, 57.

[7] S. M. Gaikwad, 'Ambedkar and Indian Nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 March 1998, pp. 515–18.

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Was it, therefore, just the magic of independence or a sudden spate of generosity or a streak of wise pragmatism that closed all fissures in India's national body politic? Or was it also the compulsions of a political situation created by the transfer of power process between 1945 and 1947 that precipitated such an unusual alliance? None of the existing studies answers the second question. It is not enough to say that the Congress appropriated dalit politics during the last years of colonial rule; it is also essential to understand what made that appropriation possible. This present essay will argue that the 'crisis' which Kamalakant Chitre mentions in his letter of 1952, originated much earlier and was made transparent by the transfer of power process. It was this crisis which paved the way for the alliance of 1947 and when that connection broke down four years later, organized dalit politics had to confront the crisis once again.

What was then, the nature of this crisis? First, it involved a *crisis of patronage*. Ever since 1917/18 the dalit leaders looked towards the colonial state for patronage; but suddenly now they discovered that this patronage was shifting. But more serious was a *crisis of representation* or *legitimacy*. The transfer of power process defined for India her political mainstream, ie., the Congress, and identified the minorities, primarily on the basis of religion e.g., Muslim or Sikh, and thus marginalized all other streams of politics and political identities. The All India Scheduled Castes Federation led by Ambedkar, because of its electoral debacle in 1946, was no longer recognized as a legitimate representative of the dalits. The privilege of representing them was now conferred on the Congress and Ambedkar found no place whatsoever in the official negotiations for the transfer of power. He now had very little choice, non-co-operation with the Congress would mean a total political marginalization. But the question is, how did dalit politics arrive at such a crisis point where it was unable to withstand the mounting political pressures and was threatened with nothing less than extinction.

The purpose of this essay is to unravel the process through which this dual *crisis* for dalit politics developed during the late colonial period. It would argue that to some extent it was the inevitable result of the transfer of power process, in which Ambedkar and his Federation were unwittingly caught and they had no power to reverse it. But to some extent, it was also due to their own organizational weakness to confront the hegemonic power of the Congress and an ideological failure to interrogate the dominant majoritarian version of nationalism. This is a facet of dalit history which has not been

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properly assessed either in the hagiographic literature on Ambedkar or in the partisan literature on dalit politics, which have almost universally tended to ignore this rather unpleasant saga of the last days of colonial rule.[8] On the other hand, such questions have received far less satisfactory discussion in literature that has delved in outright denigration of Ambedkar, such as Arun Shourie's recent controversial book, which in a bid to retrieve 'erased' facts, has only misrepresented them.[9]

Organization and Fragmentation

The pan-Indian dalit movement at an organized level started in 1926[10] at the All India Depressed Classes Leaders' Conference held at Nagpore, where the All India Depressed Classes Association was formed, with Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah as its first elected president. Dr Ambedkar, who did not attend the conference, was elected one of its vice-presidents. Thereafter, in 1928 it was proposed that Dr Ambedkar would be elected president at the annual conference of the Association to be held in Delhi. He accepted the invitation, but later failed to attend the session, whereupon, Rajah was again elected president a second time. Ambedkar's friend, Dr Solanki, tried to move a resolution to have two presidents, both Rajah and Ambedkar at the same time. But the resolution failed, as there was no seconder. Sometime later, Ambedkar resigned from this Association and in 1930 at a conference in Nagpore, founded his own All India

[8] See, for example, Mathew Thomas, *Ambedkar, Reform or Revolution* (New Delhi, 1991); W. N. Kuber, *Ambedkar: A Critical Study* (New Delhi, Revised edition, 1991); Kusum Sharma, *Ambedkar and Indian Constitution* (New Delhi, 1992); K. N. Kadam (ed.), *Dr B. R. Ambedkar: the Emancipator of the Oppressed* (Bombay, 1993); Mohammad Shabbir (ed.), *B. R. Ambedkar: Study in Law & Society* (Jaipur and New Delhi, 1997). Perhaps the only exception is Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission* (Bombay, 1990).

[9] Of particular interest here is the subtitle of his book: *Ambedkar and the Facts Which Have Been Erased*. For full reference, see note 6.

[10] The dalit movement at regional or provincial levels had of course started much earlier. Individual groups such as the Mahars of Maharashtra, the Nadars of Tamilnad, the Ezhavas of Kerala or the Namasudras of Bengal had started organizing from the early years of the twentieth century. One may perhaps also mention the Depressed Classes conference at Bombay in November 1917, under the chairmanship of Justice Sir Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar, as a very rudimentary beginning of a movement at the national level. This was followed by another conference in Baroda in early 1918. For more details on these conferences, see Zelliot, 'Congress and the Untouchables, 1917–1959', pp. 182–4.

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Depressed Classes Congress, as a 'rival' organization.[11] The fragmented structure of leadership of the organized dalit politics in India was thus set at the very beginning of its chequered career.

As for its political philosophy, there was also a major difference from the very beginning. In his inaugural address at Nagpore in August 1930, Ambedkar took a very clear anti-Congress and a mildly anti-British position, thus setting the tone for the future course of history.[12] It was in his evidence before the Simon Commission that Ambedkar first demanded separate electorate, in the absence of universal adult franchise, as the only means to secure adequate representation of the depressed classes.[13] During the first session of the Round Table Conference, he gradually moved further towards this position, as many of his comrades were in its favour.[14] Following this, an All India Depressed Classes Leaders' Conference in Bombay on 19 May 1931 formally endorsed this position by resolving that the Depressed Classes must be guaranteed 'their right as a minority to separate electorate'.[15] It was on this point that Ambedkar had a major show-down with Gandhi at the second session of the Round Table Conference. By early 1932, however, this issue of electorate had created a major rift within the Depressed Classes camp, as the M. C. Rajah group was staunchly in favour of joint electorate. The Working Committee of the latter's All India Depressed Classes Association in a meeting in February 1932 deplored Dr Ambedkar's demand for separate electorate and unanimously supported joint electorate with the Hindus, with the provision of reservation of seats on the basis of population. An agreement, known as the 'Rajah–Munje Pact', was also reached to this effect between Rajah and Dr B. S. Munje, the President of the All India Hindu Mahasabha.[16] This shows that there was never a consensus on separate electorate

[11] 'Salvation of the Depressed Classes Lies in Joint Electorates', by G. M. Thaware, Assistant General Secretary, All India Depressed Classes Association, 31 March 1932, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 3–9 Part 1, Roll No. 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi [hereafter NMML].

[12] Presidential Address, All India Depressed Classes Congress, First session, Nagpur, 8–9 August 1930, by Dr B. R. Ambedkar, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 9, Part 1, Roll 3, NMML.

[13] Gore, *The Social Context*, p. 111.

[14] Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities: Law and Backward Classes in India* (Delhi, 1984), p. 31.

[15] Government of India [hereafter GI], Reforms Office, File No. K. W. of 35/31–R, NAI.

[16] *The Hindustan Times*, 29 Feb. 1932, GI, Reforms Office, File No. 111/32-R, NAI.

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among the depressed classes, as claimed by Ambedkar at the Round Table Conference.

The differences persisted when the Communal Award recognized the right to separate electorate for the Scheduled Castes, and Gandhi embarked on his epic fast to get it revoked. Rajah, as he later claimed in a letter to Gandhi, in spite of considerable 'pressure' from 'high Government authorities including the Viceroy, the Home Member and the Indian Law Member', persuaded the representatives of his community, 'in spite of opposition of a certain section', to accept the provisions of the Poona Pact.[17] Ambedkar had little option but to accept a compromise on joint electorate, with Gandhi conceding the demand for reserved seats. For the time being it seemed as if all conflicts had been resolved. There was a nationwide interest in the temple entry movement and Gandhi's *Harijan* campaigns for the removal of untouchability took off with much fanfare. Even, although temporarily, there was co-operation between Gandhi and Ambedkar in relation to the activities of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. The provisions of the Poona Pact were later incorporated into the Government of India Act of 1935. Although there were many critics of the Pact, there were still others who fancied it to be an ultimate nationalist resolution of the untouchability question.

But disunity reappeared very soon. First of all the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar were too deep-rooted to be resolved so easily and soon Gandhi's religious approach clashed with Ambedkar's interest in fundamental structural change.[18] The Congress and Ambedkar again started moving in different directions. While Gandhi's Harijan Sevak Sangh was involved in social issues, the other Congress leaders had little interest in his mission. They needed a political front to mobilize dalit voters to win the reserved seats provided for in the new Act. For this purpose, they founded in March 1935 the All India Depressed Classes League, with Jagjivan Ram, a protégé of the Bihar Congress leader Rajendra Prasad, as the president, and the Punjab dalit leader, Prithvi Singh Azad as the general secretary. Ambedkar, on the other hand, founded in 1936 his Independent Labour Party, in a bid to mobilize the poor and the untouchables on a broader basis than caste alone. In the election of 1937, his party won spectacular victory in Bombay, winning 11 of the 15

[17] M. C. Rajah to Gandhi, 12 March 1937, M. C. Rajah Papers, NMML.

[18] For more details, see Gore, *The Social Context*, pp. 139–44; Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit*, pp. 150–72.

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reserved seats. It did well also in the Central Provinces and Berar. But the election results also revealed that outside western India, his influence was still limited. The Congress won in 73 out of 151 reserved seats all over India, which meant that they too did not enjoy the support of the majority of the dalit voters, who voted in 78 other constituencies for a variety of other parties and independents. This indicates, if nothing else, at least a highly fragmented nature of the dalit movement as late as 1937–38.

Since 1937 the situation began to change in different areas in different ways, depending on the nature of the commitment that the local Congress leaders had towards the Gandhian creed of eliminating untouchability. In the eight provinces where the Congress was in power for nearly two years, they performed in such a way that not just critics like Ambedkar were unimpressed, but even those dalit leaders who once sympathized with the Congress were gradually alienated. An ideal example is M. C. Rajah. A staunch Gandhi supporter since 1932, he became a member of the executive council of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. He won the election in 1937 from Madras, where the local Congress, in recognition of his services, did not put up any candidate against him.[19] But in 1938 when he proposed to move a Temple Entry Bill, the Congress premier, Rajagopalachari, asked him to withdraw it. When he refused and moved his bill in due course, the premier himself stood up to oppose it on the ground that he would later propose another bill in the same line, but only for Malabar and not for the other districts. The bill was then defeated, with all Congress members, including the dalits, voting against it.[20] When Rajah complained to Gandhi, the latter advised him to 'trust C. R. to do his best. . . . Go to him, reason with him and if you cannot persuade him, bear with him. That is my advice'. But his advice failed to convince a frustrated Rajah. About a month later he wrote to Gandhi in despair: 'I wish your followers in general and your chief representative in this Presidency in particular felt one half of your concern in the matter.' Gandhi was surrounded by sycophants, he lamented, who behaved well in his presence, but quickly forgot their promises and obligations when away from him.[21] In November, therefore, Rajah made a fervent 'plea for a separate Harijan party', free from the influence of the caste Hindus who dominated the Con-

[19] Rajah to Gandhi, 12 March 1937, M. C. Rajah Papers, NMML.

[20] Rajah to Gandhi, 25 Aug. 1938, 'Depressed Classes Betrayed By Gandhi and Congress: M. C. Raja–M. K. Gandhi Correspondence', M. C. Rajah Papers, NMML.

[21] Rajah to Gandhi, 17 Oct. 1938, *ibid*.

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gress.[22] In 1942 when Ambedkar started his All India Scheduled Caste Federation, with its constitution claiming the Scheduled Castes to be 'distinct and separate from the Hindus',[23] Rajah was only too happy to join this organization. In Bombay, Ambedkar too was disappointed with the Congress government. But the situation was different in non-Congress provinces. In a Muslim majority province like Bengal, electoral arithmetic made the Congress leadership realize the value of the Scheduled Caste reserved seats in the legislature. The efforts of leaders like Subhash and Sarat Chandra Bose, therefore, steadily brought the dalit leadership of the province to the side of the Congress. So when Ambedkar's Federation opened its provincial branch in 1943, it attracted very little support from the dalit leaders, as the majority of them had already joined the Congress-supported Calcutta Scheduled Caste League.[24] In other words, organized dalit politics in all-India terms never represented a monolithic structure. It always was a contested terrain, where the Federation and the Congress constantly jockeyed for exclusive space.

Towards Crisis

The fragmented nature of dalit organization gradually precipitated the crisis of representation. The bitterly debated question was, which of the two organizations—the All India Scheduled Castes Federation of Ambedkar (hereafter Federation) or the All India Depressed Classes League of Jagjivan Ram (hereafter League)—truly represented the dalits. The perceived legitimacy of this representation, ironically, depended on the official recognition of the colonial state. This question came to the forefront when the Cripps Mission visited India in 1942 and proposed to meet representatives of different political groups to negotiate for a future constitution of India. A number of provincial dalit leaders, aligned with Ambedkar, prayed for interviews with Sir Stafford Cripps and questioned the authority of other political organizations to speak for them.[25] But all these

[22] 'Plea for Separate Harijan Party', Paper-clipping in M. C. Rajah Papers, NMML.

[23] Quoted in B. R. Ambedkar, *Emancipation of the Untouchables* (Reprint, Bombay, 1972), p. 16.

[24] For details, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal 1872–1947* (Richmond, Surrey, 1997), pp. 173–209.

[25] Amulyadhan Ray, President All Bengal Scheduled Caste Federation, to the Private Secretary to Viceroy, 18 March 1942, India Office Records [hereafter IOR]: L/P&J/10/14; M. B. Mullick to Stafford Cripps, 24 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14;

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requests were turned down, as Cripps had no time to meet provincial delegations. He would, of course, see the 'all India representatives of the Depressed Classes',[26] and for this purpose an invitation was extended to Dr Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur M. C. Rajah.

This invitation put on Ambedkar's Federation the seal of official legitimacy, which was bitterly resented and vehemently resisted by his opponents, the members and affiliates of the League. In a strongly worded rejoinder, Jamuna Ram, one of the Secretaries of the League, wrote to the Viceroy that 'Dr. Ambedkar does not and cannot represent the entire section of the Depressed Classes of the country. The only body that has the privilege of calling itself the representative of the said classes is the Depressed Classes League'. In a subsequent note three days later, he urged Sir Stafford Cripps to extend an invitation to Babu Jagjivan Ram in his capacity as the president of the League.[27] The demand was reiterated more bluntly in another letter from Prithvi Singh Azad, the General Secretary of the League:

> Dr. Ambedkar and R. B. M. C. Rajah may represent their particular caste but they have no locus standi to represent all the depressed classes of India. If sir, you leave India without meeting the representatives of the All India Depressed Classes League, people shall have reasons to suspect the bona-fides of the British Government's Mission in India.[28]

Yet, in spite of such strong protestation, Cripps in a curt reply regretted his inability 'to grant interviews to representatives of *individual organisations*'.[29] In other words, in spite of all pleadings he refused to recognize the League as the 'legitimate' representative of the dalits—a status that was conferred on the Federation, represented by Rajah and Ambedkar. This conferment did not of course go uncontested. Apart from some provincial organizations,[30] the Working Committee of the League met on 2 April, with Jagjivan Ram in the chair, and put on record their displeasure at the official

Hari Prasad Tamta, President, Kumaon Shilpkar Sabha and UP Adi Hindu Depressed Class Association, to Sir Stafford Cripps, 27 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

[26] F. F. Turnbull to Ch. Moola Singh, 27 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

[27] Jamuna Ram to Viceroy, 22 March 1942; Jamuna Ram to the Private Secretary to Sir Stafford Cripps, 25 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

[28] Prithvi Singh Azad to Sir Stafford Cripps, 28 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

[29] B. C. A. Cook, Private Secretary to Sir Stafford Cripps to Prithvi Singh Azad, 29 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14. Italics added.

[30] G. M. Thaware to Private Secretary to the Viceroy, 29 March 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14; Telegram from O. M. Chidambaram to Viceroy, 8 April 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

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position. After three days of deliberation it adopted a memorandum which announced that the League was 'the *only representative body* of the Depressed Classes', and by not consulting it, Sir Cripps had cast all democratic principles to the winds, in pursuance of a policy of divide and rule.

> As the Depressed Classes are religiously and culturally have become one with the Hindu Society, any effort to drive a wedge between the so-called caste-Hindus and the Depressed Classes will prove injurious to both of them . . . Therefore the League strongly condemns the move of those persons who want to encourage separatist mentality among a section of the Depressed Classes and declares that it will resist all such designs to disintegrate the Hindu society.[31]

But this was once again a disputed claim. In Azad's own province, the Punjab Provincial Depressed Classes Association expressed its confidence in the leadership of Ambedkar and Rajah, condemned the 'pro-Hindu' leaders like Azad and claimed that the Scheduled Castes were 'racially and culturally different from all'.[32] In a similar way, the Working Committee of the Punjab Balmiki Depressed Classes League in a meeting on 8 April condemned the action of such 'nominal and irresponsible leaders' as Ram and Azad and emphatically claimed that 'the Depressed Classes are neither Hindus nor they want to be Hindus'.[33] Thus in 1942, there was no consensus among the dalits. But in the official gaze of the colonial state, it was the Congress-supported League which suffered from a crisis of representation, and Ambedkar and his Federation were recognized as the 'legitimate' representatives of the dalits. In about four years' time this situation was to be exactly reversed, putting Ambedkar in an identical crisis of legitimacy.

If Ambedkar received the expected recognition from Sir Stafford Cripps, his Mission also precipitated the crisis for his politics and this was the crisis of patronage. In an uneven playing field of Indian politics, Ambedkar and other dalit organizations had all along looked to the colonial state for adequate protection of their political and civil rights. But when the two dalit leaders met Sir Stafford Cripps on 30 March, they discovered that this patronage was gradually shift-

[31] Memorandum of the All India Depressed Classes League, 4 April 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14. Emphasis added.

[32] President, Punjab Provincial Depressed Classes Association to Governor General, 6 April 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

[33] Punjab Balmiki Depressed Classes League to Sir Stafford Cripps, n.d., IOR: L/P&J/10/14.

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ing and they were going to be placed 'under an unmitigated system of Hindu rule'.[34] The Cripps proposals, Ambedkar thought, did not provide for adequate protection of the political rights of the Scheduled Castes. He immediately denounced the proposals as 'a betrayal of past undertakings . . . and as a defeatist surrender to the Congress and Muslim League'.[35] A Special Scheduled Castes Political Conference held at Allahabad on 10 December 1942, resolved that 'India . . . [was] not a nation but . . . a constellation of nations . . .'. Within this federation, the Scheduled Castes were recognized as 'a separate political group' in the Round Table Conference, in the Communal Award and in the Viceroy's August declaration. But the Cripps proposals had completely ignored their interests and had paved the way for the 'framing of the future constitution of Caste-Hindus'.[36]

In a subsequent Memorandum to Linlithgow, Ambedkar further clarified his objections to Cripps' proposals. They provided two ways of protecting the interests of the minorities, he pointed out, '(1) through Constituent Assembly and (2) through the provision of a Treaty'. The Treaty provision,[37] borrowed from the Irish model, was incompatible with the idea of dominion status, he argued. And the Constituent Assembly plan would 'be fatal to the Depressed Classes', because the Hindus would be a majority there and would refuse to recognize the dalits as a minority. In a joint electorate, it would not be difficult for the Hindus to have their own nominees elected in all the 151 seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes in the provincial assemblies, and thereby control the 15 seats in the Constituent Assembly which were due to such classes. This was a distinct possibility, because although the dalits did not participate in 'the present subversive movement started by the Congress', the latter were trying to enlist them 'to show to the outside world that the Depressed Classes . . . [were] with the Congress'. Ever since the Congress made this proposal of a Constituent Assembly, he pointed out, the govern-

[34] B. R. Ambedkar and M. C. Rajah to Sir Stafford Cripps, 1 April 1942, in Nicholas Mansergh, (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942–7* (London, 1970), Vol. I, p. 603.

[35] Summary of statement by Dr Ambedkar, 4 April 1942, IOR: L/P&J/10/13.

[36] President, Adi Hindu Depressed Classes Association to Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for India, n.d., IOR: L/P&J/8/685.

[37] The Cripps proposals had provided for the signing of a treaty between His Majesty's Government and the Indian Constitution-making body. It would 'make provision, in accordance with undertakings given by His Majesty's government, for the protection of racial and religious minorities'. See Draft Declaration for Discussion with Indian Leaders (as published) in *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 565.

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ment had been consistently rejecting it. But now, 'for reasons best known to them His Majesty's Government thought it necessary to win over the Congress by surrendering to its demands without caring to know what would be the fate of the minorities'. And he was particularly apprehensive, because although the Cripps Mission had failed, no one could say 'with confidence of certainty that the Cripps proposals . . . [were] dead and gone'.[38]

The sub-text that comes out clearly from the above Memorandum is an anxiety at the prospect of colonial patronage gradually shifting towards the Congress, which might some day establish itself as the legitimate representative of the dalits in India. And this was not any more a very distant possibility, as it was clearly indicated by a private correspondence between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy around this time.

> The fundamental weakness of the Scheduled Castes is that they are neither one thing nor the other. If they had the courage to turn Christian or Moslem en bloc it would be much easier to legislate for them. But so long as they remain a part of the Hindu system, with no separate religion or basis of organisation as such, and continue to regard themselves as Hindus, it does look as if their only chance of betterment lay, not on the political side, but on gradually winning their way socially in the Hindu community.[39]

The passage makes it clear that the colonial bureaucracy at this stage was defining political identities in India on the basis of religion alone, and endorsing, to a large extent, the Gandhian position that the salvation of the dalits lay in their religious integration into the Hindu society. Such official definition was about to marginalize all other minority identities in India that were not defined by religion. Ambedkar's struggle, therefore, was to reverse this political tide released by the transfer of power process and affirmed by the other dominant political groups in the country. Alternately, he could reiterate more forcefully that the dalits were not Hindus, but a *religious minority*, in line with the official definition.

The situation in 1942–43 was not yet bad enough for Ambedkar. Linlithgow was still 'convinced' that he was 'the right and only proper representative of the Depressed Classes',[40] and therefore, shortly after the departure of Cripps, in July 1942 he was invited to join the Viceroy's Executive Council as a Labour Member. In October,

[38] Ambedkar to Linlithgow, 8 Jan. 1943, IOR: L/P&J/8/685.
[39] Secretary of State to Viceroy, 8 Feb. 1943, IOR: L/P&J/8/685.
[40] Telegram from Linlithgow to Amery, 20 Feb. 1942, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. I, p. 211.

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in response to a request from the Viceroy, he submitted a lengthy Memorandum, 'containing the grievances of the Scheduled Castes and the remedies for removing them'. In it he humbly reminded the Viceroy that: 'Government has a duty towards the Scheduled Castes . . .'.[41] At least the Secretary of State, it seemed, had not forgotten this duty. The Scheduled Castes, he argued, constituted 'between a sixth and a seventh of the whole population of India'. And also there were 'politically very considerable advantages in having two substantial minorities'. The government could thus avoid being labelled as either 'pro-Muslum' or 'anti-Hindu'.[42] In the next year, therefore, substantial concessions were offered to the Scheduled Castes. These included an additional seat in the Central Assembly, reservation in the Indian Civil Service, reservation of 8.5 per cent in recruitment to the Central Services, reservation for technical training in certain government institutions and an allocation of Rs 3 lakhs for scholarships for technical training in India and abroad.[43]

But these were certainly not enough. It had become clear by now that the British were going to withdraw from India, and in such a contingency, the dalits had to find a niche within the new political structure of free India. In reply to a reception in Calcutta on 26 August 1944, a panicky Ambedkar therefore reacted by saying that 'there should be no transfer of power . . . unless and until the Depressed Classes . . . [were] elevated in education, economic conditions and social position to the level of the other more fortunate sections of His Majesty's subjects'.[44] He knew clearly that it was not going to happen; but he had to ensure that the interests of the dalits were protected in the new constitution of independent India. So far as the colonial government was concerned, things were still going well for Ambedkar. In a telegram to the Viceroy on 5 August, the Secretary of State had made it clear that the offer of unqualified freedom after the war would be conditional on the framing of a constitution, agreed to by all the 'main elements of India's national life', including the 'Depressed Classes'.[45] Wavell communicated this message to Gandhi on 15 August.[46] But neither Gandhi nor Jinnah

[41] Ambedkar to Linlithgow, 29 Oct. 1942, IOR: L/P&J/8/685.
[42] Amery to Linlithgow, 16 Dec. 1942, IOR: L/P&J/8/685.
[43] *The Statesman*, 30 Nov. 1943.
[44] *The Hindu*, 26 Sept. 1944, Paper-cutting in Ambedkar Papers, File No. 103, NMML.
[45] Telegram from Secretary of State to Viceroy, 4 Aug. 1944, Wavell Collection, Vol. 3, p. 32, Mss.Eur.D.977, India Office Library [hereafter IOL].
[46] Wavell to Gandhi, 15 Aug. 1944, Wavell Collection, Vol. 3, p. 41.

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and the Muslim League, as it appeared, were prepared to involve the dalits in any serious negotiations. In response to a letter from Ambedkar, Gandhi curtly reminded him that he considered untouchability to be a question of religious and social reform, and therefore did not require a political solution. And because of this difference of opinion, he would prefer to move alone, without Ambedkar.[47] It was this intransigence which was for Ambedkar the real reason for concern.

Therefore, when the Gandhi–Jinnah talks commenced in Bombay, Ambedkar in a press statement in September 1944 reminded them of 'making a serious mistake'. For, '[b]esides the Hindus and the Muslims, the Scheduled Castes are a third necessary party. ... [They] could not be included in Pakistan without their express consent ...'[48] A few days later at another meeting in Hyberabad, he declared emphatically that: 'If Hindustan belonged to any one, it was to the three parties, namely, Hindus, Muslims and Scheduled Castes.'[49] Because, as he argued, the latter were 'no' part of the Hindu community, but constituted a different nation'. He also refuted the allegation that the dalits were not interested in freedom and asserted that 'they wanted the independence of their community along with the independence of the country'.[50] In other words, his primary project now was to get the Scheduled Castes recognized as '*a third necessary party*' for any serious negotiations for the transfer of power.

This point came up in a major way in the meeting of the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, held in Madras on 23 September 1944. It was presided over by N. Sivaraj and participated by Ambedkar. One of the resolutions adopted in this meeting reiterated that the Scheduled Castes were 'a *religious minority* in real sense and within the meaning of the Cripps Proposals'[51] or in other words, exactly in accordance with the official definition of a minority. And therefore, no constitution of free India would be acceptable to them, unless it recognized them as 'a distinct

[47] The correspondence was reported in *Anandabazar Patrika*, 7 Jan. 1945.

[48] *Times of India*, 5 Sept. 1944, Paper-clipping, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 1–3, NMML.

[49] *The Hyderabad Bulletin*, 20 Sept. 1944, in *ibid.*

[50] *Leader*, 22 Sept. 1944, Paper-cutting in GI, Reforms Office, File No. 21/6/44-R, NAI.

[51] *The Mail*, 24 Sept. 1944, Paper-clipping, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 1–3, NMML. Italics added.

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and separate element in the national life of India' and provided for them a system of separate electorate and reservation in public services. But more interesting was the resolution on the 'separate settlement' for the Scheduled Castes. It proposed that the constitution should provide for the transportation of such castes from their present habitats to form separate Scheduled Caste villages away from the Hindu villages. A Settlement Commission was to be constituted for this purpose, with adequate funds to buy private lands to set up such separate settlements for the dalits.[52] Such an arrangement was necessary, the resolution argued, for the 'better protection' of the dalits from the 'tyranny and oppression of the caste Hindus', which might 'take a worse form under Swaraj . . .'.[53]

The Working Committee of the Scheduled Caste Federation at this stage, it appears, wished to push the idea of separate identity to its most extreme limit, in the same way as the Muslim League was pushing its Pakistan demand. Extremist rhetorics were flowing ebulliently from Ambedkar himself, causing embarrassment to the Viceroy, as at this stage he was also a member of the Executive Council.[54] At a large gathering, for example, at Ellore on 30 September, he thundered: 'If the British have a hundred reasons to fight the Germans, you untouchables have a thousand and more causes to fight the Hindus. You must be prepared to state that if argument fails, force will be used to obtain your rights.'[55] But such rhetoric notwithstanding, the main ambition of the dalit leadership, as Ambedkar himself made it clear in another public meeting in Madras, was to ensure that the new constitution of free India was 'a tripartite one in which the Hindus, Muslims and the Scheduled Castes . . . [had] equal place and equal authority'.[56]

A clearer blueprint of this preferred constitution for free India was offered at another meeting of the All Scheduled Caste Federation, held in Bombay on 6 May 1945. The new constitution, Ambedkar announced in his Presidential Address, should be 'framed by Indians for Indians and with the voluntary consent of Indians'. A

[52] *The Hindu*, 24 Sept. 1944, Paper-cutting in GI, Reforms Office, File No. 21/6/44-R, NAI.

[53] *The Mail*, 24 Sept. 1944, Paper-clipping, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 1–3, NMML.

[54] Wavell to Amery, 8 Nov. 1944, IOR: L/P&J/8/683.

[55] *Dawn*, 3 Oct. 1944, Paper-cutting in GI, Reforms Office, File No. 21/9/44-R, NAI.

[56] *The Mail*, 26 Sept. 1944, Paper-clipping, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 1–3, NMML.

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constitution 'imposed by one powerful section or a combination of such sections on other sections' would not do. Such a constitution should also seek to eliminate 'majority rule', which was 'untenable in theory and unjustifiable in practice'. Because, in India the majority was 'not a political majority', but a 'communal majority', which was born, not made, and therefore could not be 'unmade and remade'. It was 'a permanent majority fixed in its attitude', which could be destroyed but not transformed. The rule by such a majority could therefore never be sacrosanct and to avoid it there should be reservation of seats for the caste Hindus, Muslims and the Scheduled Castes in equal proportions in both central and provincial Assemblies. Even the Executive would not be formed by the majority party in the legislature; it should have the 'mandate not only from the majority but also from the minorities in the Legislature'. This arrangement, he hoped, would solve the communal problem in India and even would satisfy the Muslims, as it would eliminate the danger of domination by a communal majority. 'My proposals', he claimed, 'are for an United India'. And its underlying principle was 'a rule of unanimity'. 'It is obvious', he argued, 'that if the principle of unanimity was accepted by the Hindus as a rule of decision in the Legislature and in the Executive there would be no such thing as a Communal Problem in India'. And if this was not done, freedom would be vulnerable and meaningless, Ambedkar warned:

> Without making any such sacrifice the Hindu majority is not justified in representing to the outside world that the minorities are holding up India's Freedom. The false propaganda will not pay. For the minorities are doing nothing of the kind. They are prepared to accept freedom and the dangers in which they likely [*sic*] to be involved; provided they granted [*sic*] satisfactory safeguards.[57]

The official British policy of recognizing the Scheduled Castes as a substantial minority had not been completely reversed yet and Ambedkar was still being acknowledged as their legitimate representative. In a routine appraisal of the political situation in India in April 1944, Wavell found Ambedkar to be having 'a certain following amongst the Depressed Classes but it ... [was] not influential'.[58] Yet, a few months later, in October when he started contemplating a 'transitional government', representing all political parties, he

[57] Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* (Bombay, 1979), Vol. I, pp.360, 368–9, 373, 376–8.

[58] 'Appreciation of the Indian Political Situation by His Excellency the Viceroy', April 1944, Wavell Collection, Vol. 3, p. 11.

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could only think of Ambedkar as the representative of the Depressed Classes.[59] Even in November 1944 when the Non-Party Conference appointed a committee under Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to discuss the basis of a future constitution of India, the latter turned to Ambedkar to recommend the names of dalit representatives on the sub-committee for the Scheduled Castes. Ambedkar initially favoured the proposal, but later declined to co-operate, as he found some other members of the committee to be already prejudiced against the minorities.[60] The Sapru Conciliation Committee, however, was doomed to failure, as Jinnah too, like Ambedkar, refused to co-operate.[61] But the fact that comes out clearly from the developments of this period is that until now, despite Gandhi's reservations, the dalits were still being officially considered as an important and discrete element in Indian public life, and Ambedkar was universally regarded as their accredited leader. However, it was also the time when things had begun to change and the latter's vision of a 'rule of unanimity' was fast becoming an unrealistic dream.

When Wavell on 14 June 1945 announced his plan to convene a conference with a view to forming a new 'entirely Indian' Executive Council (except for the presence of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-chief), representing all the 'main communities' of India, he did not forget to include the Scheduled Castes.[62] The Hindu Mahasabha at once protested against the move to separate the Scheduled Castes from the caste Hindus, which they thought was calculated to 'bring about disintegration of the Hindus'.[63] The Congress newspapers also resented this and protested against its implication that Congress represented only the caste Hindus.[64] Gandhi too complained against the caste Hindus being distinguished from others and argued that Congress was a national and not a communal party.[65] But Wavell did not share this view and asked Ambedkar to

[59] Viceroy to Secretary of State, 5 Oct. 1944, Wavell Collection, Vol. 3, p. 78.
[60] *Anandabazar Patrika*, 2, 3, 21 Jan. 1945.
[61] Fortnightly Report on the Press for the second half of January 1945, Government of Bengal [hereafter GB], Home (Political) Confidential File No. 37/45, West Bengal State Archives.
[62] Broadcast speech by His Excellency the Viceroy at New Delhi on the 14th June 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.
[63] Telegram from L. B. Bhopatkar, General Secretary. All India Hindu Mahasabha to Secretary of State for India, 14 June 1945, IOR: L/P&J/8/683.
[64] Press Adviser's appreciation for the second half of June 1945, IOR: L/P&J/5/152.
[65] Wavell to Amery, Secret Report on Simla Conference, 15 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.

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represent the Scheduled Castes in the Simla conference. The latter, however, declined the offer and recommended instead the name of N. Sivaraj, the President of the Federation, as a 'substitute'. His main reason for refusing to attend the conference was the 'extreme inadequacy' of representation given to the Scheduled Castes in the proposed Executive Council.

> Five seats to 90 millions of Muslims, one seat to 50 millions of Untouchables and 1 seat to 6 million of Sikhs is a strange and sinister kind of political arithmetic which is revolting to my ideas of justice and common sense. I cannot be a party to it. . . .
> . . . What shocks me that His Majesty's Government with all their profession of being trustees for the Scheduled Castes and contrary to their repeated declarations should have treated their wards in such an ill-liberal, unfair and unjust manner. . . .[66]

Ambedkar asked for at least two dalit representatives in the Council, although Wavell was not so sure about it. Inclusion of two Scheduled Caste members in a Council of fourteen Indians, he thought, would not be 'justified', particularly as this might lead to similar demands from Sikhs and Indian Christians, and might incur the disapproval of Gandhi.[67] But the Secretary of State, on the other hand, was more sympathetic, as he was constantly receiving telegrams from dalit organizations, demanding three seats. And to forestall Gandhi's objection, he suggested party, rather than community basis, for selecting members, 'for Gandhi surely . . . [could not] deny the existence of Ambedkar's party organisation'.[68] Two things come out clearly from this pre-Simla correspondence. First, there was a growing concern in Ambedkar that colonial patronage was shifting. And second, although the colonial state still recognized the legitimacy of his leadership and his organization, there were also doubts popping up in the minds of some of the officials.

At the Simla conference, it was the community–party equation which became the most disputed issue. While Jinnah demanded parity with the Congress and refused to accept Congress nominating any Muslim member for the proposed Executive Council, the Congress representatives could not accept the contention that their party represented only the caste Hindus. Sivaraj, on the other hand,

[66] Ambedkar to Wavell, 7 June 1945, Wavell Collection, Vol. 4, pp. 207–8.
[67] Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 8 June 1945, Wavell Collection, Vol. 4, p. 221.
[68] Telegram from Secretary of State to Viceroy, 22 June 1945, Wavell Collection, Vol. 4, p. 262.

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objected to Muslim demand for parity, because he thought that the Muslims too were one of the minorities and granting them a privileged position would reduce the shares of the other minorities.[69] Ambedkar too in a note to the Viceroy protested against the proposed parity.[70] But what is more interesting, while Congress insisted on including in its list members of other communities, particularly the Scheduled Castes, Sivaraj objected to such claims, as the Scheduled Castes, he contended, constituted a separate community and could only be represented by the Scheduled Caste Federation.[71] The Viceroy, however, thought that Congress could 'reasonably ask to have one non-Hindu seat', notably one Scheduled Caste man.[72]

After consulting his Working Committee, Sivaraj on 2 July sent to the Viceroy a panel of four nominees of the Federation, and they were Ambedkar, Sivaraj himself, Jogendranath Mandal from Bengal and Ram Prasad Tamta from UP.[73] According to the Viceroy, the list included 'Ambedkar, Sivaraj and two non-entities'.[74] The Congress list of fourteen, on the other hand, included two Scheduled Castes: Muniswami Pillai from Madras and Radhanath Das from Bengal.[75] While constituting his Council, the Viceroy was now faced with what his private secretary Evan Jenkins described as the 'incompatible claims' of the Congress, the Muslim League and the Scheduled Castes. The Congress could legitimately claim one of their Scheduled Caste nominees to be included, while the Viceroy thought that Ambedkar was 'the only Scheduled Caste man of outstanding ability'.[76] So the compromise was to have Ambedkar, although Congress might object to him, and Muniswami Pillai, from the Congress list, as he was found to be an 'amiable non-entity'. Provisionally, Ambedkar was allocated the Labour portfolio and Pillai Education.[77] But the new Executive Council never became operative, as Jinnah on 10 July finally communicated his refusal to co-operate, unless all

[69] Minutes of the Conference of Political Leaders held in Viceregal Lodge, Simla, on Monday the 25th June 1945, Political Volume Part II, Simla Conference June–July 1945, Wavell Collection, Vol. 5, p. 127.
[70] Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 7 June 1945, Wavell Collection, Vol. 4, p. 219.
[71] Simla Conference, Confidential Note No. 5 for 29th June 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.
[72] Viceroy to Secretary of State, 1 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.
[73] N. Sivaraj to Wavell, 2 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/101.
[74] Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 8 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.
[75] Maulana Azad to Wavell, 7 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/96.
[76] Notes by E. M. Jenkins, dated 7 July, 9 July and 11 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.
[77] Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 9 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/96.

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the Muslim members were taken from the League—a demand which the Viceroy declined to accept.[78] So far as dalit politics were concerned, as the Federation resisted and then reluctantly accepted the parallel Congress claim to represent the Scheduled Castes, the Simla conference foreshadowed its future crisis, ie., the Congress gradually nudging it out completely from its own constituency.

The Crisis

The crisis of representation for dalit politics manifested itself in the elections of 1945–46, in which the Congress almost completely ousted the Federation from the Scheduled Castes reserved seats all over India. In Bombay, where in 1937 the non-Congress dalits had won 12 General seats, this time the Federation contested in 19 General seats, including 15 reserved seats, and was defeated in almost all by Congress candidates. So far as the reserved seats were concerned, 14 went to Congress candidates and the remaining one to an Independent candidate. Congress won all the reserved seats in Madras (30), United Provinces (20), Bihar (15), Assam (7) and Orissa (7). Among the other provinces, in Bengal Congress won in 24 out of 30 reserved seats, the independent candidates winning in 4, the Communist Party in 1 and the Federation in 1 only. In Punjab, the Congress won in 6 and the Unionists in 2 of the 8 reserved seats. In the Central Provinces and Berar, another previous stronghold of the Federation, Congress won in 19 of the 20 reserved seats, the Federation candidate taking the other one.[79] So, out of 151 reserved seats all over India, the Federation candidates won in only 2 seats—one in Bengal and one in C.P. But what was more startling, even in the Primary Elections, the Federation had contested only in 22 seats and only in Bombay and C.P., votes polled in favour of the Federation were more than those cast in favour of the Congress. In Madras, the situation was more or less evenly balanced, while in the rest of the country, the votes cast in favour of Congress and 'others' were much more than those in favour of the Federation. The colonial govern-

[78] Telegram from Viceroy to all Governors, 11 July 1945, IOR: R/3/1/95.

[79] 'Statement showing the results of the elections to the Indian Legislative Assembly, and to the Legislative Assemblies in Madras, Bombay, Bengal, The United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar, Assam, Northwest Frontier Province, Sind, Central Provinces and Berar and Orissa', IOR: L/P&J/8/483; also see, GI, Home (Political) File No. 79/46–Poll(I), Vol. III, NAI.

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ment could draw only one predictable conclusion from this electoral disaster:

> . . . [T]he Federation has only local influence in a few areas in Bombay and the C.P. . . . The fact that they have not forced the issue in as much as 129 out of the 151 constituencies—and have not even put up candidates in quite a good number of constituencies—must be taken to be an indication that they had no reasonable chance of success even in the primary elections.[80]

The question now is, how to explain this disaster. The Working Committee of the Federation had perhaps anticipated it, as in a resolution adopted at a meeting in Poona on 2–3 October 1945, it had expressed its concern. The high property qualifications, it argued, had excluded the majority of the dalits from franchise, and therefore in a general electorate they had hardly any chance of getting their own representatives elected to the provincial legislatures. And therefore, the resolution claimed, a Constituent Assembly, drawn from such unrepresentative provincial legislatures would have no 'moral authority to frame a constitution'.[81] But even though we recognize the undeniable truth in this contention, we cannot explain the spectacular disaster only in terms of joint electorate. It cannot explain why the overwhelming majority of votes even in the primary elections, where only the dalits voted, went to candidates other than those of the Federation. And more particularly, it cannot explain why the Federation could not even field candidates in as many as 129 out of 151 reserved seats. What this situation perhaps clearly indicates is a near total lack of organization.

The Working Committee of the Federation, in view of the crucial importance of this election, had issued an appeal to all dalits in the country to join the Federation and to make it 'the sole representative body of the Scheduled Castes'. It had also warned that helping those who had joined other political organizations for personal advantages would be considered as acts of 'treason against the community'.[82] But clearly the Federation had no organizational machinery to mobilize such mass support at a national level or prevent large-scale defections that were eroding its support base. After the 1952 elec-

[80] Memorandum on the elections to the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes in the Provincial Assemblies, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[81] Resolutions passed by the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation at its meeting held in Poona on the 2/3rd of October 1945, IOR: L/P&J/8/685.

[82] *Ibid.*

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tion fiasco, Kamalakant Chitre in a letter to Ambedkar mentioned the lack of organization as the 'foremost' cause of the defeat. 'Our own organisation was a tattered one'. He wrote. 'Practically there is nothing except your name, but for which we would have been nowhere'.[83] If this was the situation in January 1952, one could imagine the scenario in 1946, when even Ambedkar himself had no time, particularly since his appointment as the Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council in 1942, to give his personal attention to such organizational matters. As a result, as the *Dawn* reported, 'his community . . . [was] unable to derive the full benefit of his dynamic leadership'.[84] The Federation also miserably lacked funds to conduct a viable election campaign. When Ambedkar launched his election campaign at Nare Park in Bombay on 3 March 1946, entry to his meeting was by ticket. Although 70,000 people gathered, and the gate money collected was Rs 17,000, such an admission fee could definitely act as a disincentive to attend meetings for a population that usually had little money to spare. As the President of the Bombay branch of the Federation announced, the target was to raise in this way a campaign fund of Rs 50,000; but it would hardly match the Congress funds, which were being lavishly supported by the capitalists.[85]

But the greatest hurdle for the Federation was the popular appeal of nationalism and the euphoria of patriotism created by the recent Quit India movement, which had set the tone for the election campaign of 1945–46. Even though outwardly a failure, the Congress had emerged from this movement with a certain aura and a nationwide political legitimacy which no other party at that time could match. It was precisely for that reason that the Justice Party in Madras did not field any candidate against the Congress in this election. As Sir P. T. Rajan stated later before the Cabinet Mission, owing to their support for the British government in the past, they were 'dubbed as traitors by the electorate'.[86] Ambedkar's joining the Viceroy's Executive Council at a time when Quit India movement

[83] Unsigned letter, [most probably written by Kamalakant Chitre to B. R. Ambedkar], 14 Jan. 1952, Dr B. R. Ambedkar Papers, NAI.

[84] *Dawn*, 20 March 1946, Paper-clipping in Ambedkar Papers, File Nos. 1–3, NMML.

[85] *Jay Bheem*, 5 March 1946, Paper clipping in Ambedkar Papers, File Nos. 1–3, NMML.

[86] Note of Meeting between Sir S. Cripps, Mr. Alexander and Sir P. T. Rajan on Wednesday 17 April 1946, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, p. 290.

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was being launched was itself a controversial matter. Over and above that, he was preaching an altogether different version of nationalism which was severely critical of the Congress variety. The 'freedom of the nation', he believed, 'if it . . . [was] to be a reality must vouchsafe the freedom of the different classes comprised in it, particularly . . . the servile classes'.[87] But the 'freedom which the governing class in India . . . [was] struggling for', he pointed out, was 'freedom to rule the servile classes'.[88] And the Congress, in his opinion, represented only the governing classes, preached only that variety of nationalism which protected the interests of those classes and 'prohibit[ed] any other ideology inconsistent with nationalism being preached from its platform'.[89] As the election approached, Ambedkar tried to clarify his position before the general electorate. At a meeting in Agra on 10 March 1946 he declared: 'The Scheduled Castes stand for the freedom of India and not for the Congress-High class Hindu rule.' It was only Congress which was their 'greatest enemy'. Because they treated the dalits 'worse than dogs'. In other words, they were fighting against the Congress, not against freedom. 'We shall fight for our rights', he thundered, 'and we will give our life for it, and God willing we will have it'.[90]

But this definition of nationalism, constructed exclusively from the dalit point of view, could hardly hope to dislodge the dominant definition created by the unusual circumstances of the Quit India movement. The political agenda of this nationalism was to drive the British out, not to bother so much about citizen's rights in a future Indian nation state. Any one going against this nationalism was bound to be labelled as unpatriotic. Congress leaders like Nehru could only see in their critics, 'their anti-nationalism, their subservience, their capacity to crush and humiliate their own countrymen'.[91] Ambedkar himself later acknowledged that all other non-Congress parties, particularly the Scheduled Castes Federation, suffered in the election 'because they were pro-British and had co-operated in the war efforts'. The main 'issue over which the election was fought was Independence and Quit India', and not the future constitution of

[87] *Dr. Banasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches*, Vol. IX, p. 202.
[88] *Ibid.*, p. 231.
[89] *Ibid.*, pp. 233–4.
[90] News From India: Political Situation, Section No. 15, Serial No. 81, 18 March 1946, GI, Home (Political), File No. 51/2/1946(9), NAI.
[91] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta, 1946), pp. 599–601, quoted in Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods*, p. 116.

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India.[92] And as a result, not only the Scheduled Caste Federation, but all other minor political parties, including the Hindu Mahasabha, were marginalized by the Congress in the election of 1945–46. What F. G. Burrows, the Governor of Bengal, wrote to Wavell on 11 April 1946, was true for the whole of India and not for Bengal alone, and therefore needs to be quoted here to bring out the real significance of this election:

> In the non-Mohammedan and Special Constituencies, the election has seen the virtual elimination by the Congress of the smaller parties,—the non-Congress Scheduled Castes and the Hindu Nationalist Party, which included the Mahasabha,—and the substantial defeat of Communist hope.[93]

So Ambedkar's defeat was nothing unusual and not unexpected. His greatest problem now was to prove that his Federation, in spite of this electoral set back, was the only organization that could claim to represent the dalits. It was indeed a difficult task. By 1945–46 the Congress and later the Communists had substantially eroded his support base by specifically targeting this population for political mobilization. If we take Bombay as an example, as it was Ambedkar's main stronghold, the local Congress Harijan Committee here had launched from January 1945 a campaign for 'fraternising with the Harijans in this City'. A detailed programme was chalked out for a week which was to be observed everyday and would involve 'as many Congress workers as possible'. The programme included cleaning the Harijan localities, giving baths to Harijan boys and girls, organizing separate social gatherings for men and women, to be addressed by prominent Congress leaders, etc.[94] Then in February a more long-term programme was launched and it included a training camp for Harijans, night classes for such adults, outings for grown-up school-going Harijan children, provision for libraries and reading rooms for them and observance of special functions on important days and Congress celebrations in Harijan neighbourhoods.[95] Then on 22 February 1945, the first anniversary day of the death of Kasturbai Gandhi, two temples in Bombay were ceremonially opened to Hari-

[92] B. R. Ambedkar, 'The Cabinet Mission and the Untouchables', Ambedkar Papers, File No. 9, Part 1–2, Roll No. 3, NMML.

[93] F. G. Burrows, Governor of Bengal, to Wavell, 18 July 1946, IOR: L/P&J/5/153.

[94] Appeal from the Secretary, Congress Harijan Committee, Bombay, 10 Jan. 1945, Bombay PCC Papers, File No. 84, NMML.

[95] M. D. Dandekar, Secretary, Service to Harijan Committee, to S. K. Patil, General Secretary BPCC, 2 Feb. 1945, Bombay PCC Papers, File No. 84, NMML.

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jans, in the presence of the local Congress president S. K. Patil and the Sankaracharya, who blessed the Harijans on the occasion.[96] And so far as political representation was concerned, the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee resolved in a meeting on 16 January 1946 that '[t]he representation of minorities and harijans shall not only be maintained but efforts made to increase it as far as possible'.[97] Finally, the Congress Election Manifesto of 1945–46 not only promised a constitution which would make all citizens 'equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex', but promised to carry through Gandhi's constructive programme and ensure that the 'distinction between the caste Hindus and Harijans ... [was] abolished'.[98] One might argue that Congress was motivated by electoral arithmetic, rather than genuine altruism, and these were just cosmetic measures, which did not mean any real change in the life of the dalits. But what mattered was the high visibility of such programmes in an election year and possibly that created in its favour a desired swing in the voter's sympathy. Apart from that, the Congress high command also took special interest in the Scheduled Caste constituency, as Patel sent specific instructions to the Vidarbha Provincial Congress Committee to take care of the Mahar community, so that 'no one of the followers of Dr. Ambedkar' could succeed.[99]

In various other parts of India outside Bombay and the Central Provinces, which were the strongholds of Ambedkarite politics, the Congress party and the Gandhian programme of Harijan upliftment were gradually winning the loyalty of the local dalits. Mysore, for example, had become 'a model of "*Ram-Raj*"', while in general in all the Kanada-speaking districts, the Harijan movement was gradually becoming more and more popular since the early 1930s. In the Teluga-speaking coastal Andhra and Hyderabad, the 'Adi-Andhra' movement disappeared by the early 1940s, and dalit politics was divided into three streams: the Congress Party at the one end and the pro-Muslim (or pro-Nizam) politics of patronage at the other,

[96] Invitation letter from M. D. Dandekar, Secretary, Services to Harijans Committee of the Congress, 21 Feb. 1945, Bombay PCC Papers, File No. 84, NMML.

[97] Minutes of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee urgent meeting held on 16 Jan. 1946, Bombay PCC Papers, Subject Files No. 35, NMML.

[98] Bureau of Public Information, Government of India, Reference Series—6, 'The Indian National Congress', GI, Home (Political), File No. 79/46, Vol. I, NAI.

[99] *Sardar Patel's Correspondence*, Durga Das (ed.), Vol. II, pp. 344–5, cited in Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods*, p. 50.

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with the Communist movement gradually gaining ground preparing the base for the Telengana uprising. Ultimately, however, by the time of independence, 'the establishment of Congress hagemony became nearly complete' in this region. Far away from Andhra, in eastern India too, Jagjivan Ram through his Bihar Khet Mazdoor Sabha was assiduously trying to win over the allegiance of the local dalits, away from the Scheduled Caste Federation and the Communist-led Kisan Sabhas.[100] In Bengal, Subhas Bose and later his brother Sarat Bose had already bridged the gulf between the Congress and the more popular dalit leadership in the province, through a new outfit called the Calcutta Scheduled Caste League. Jogendranath Mandal in 1945–46 was a lonely man in Bengal still bearing the flag of the Ambedkarite Federation. On the other hand, in north Bengal, the Communist-led Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha was gradually consolidating its base among the dalit peasantry, preparing the way for the coming of the Tebhaga movement.[101]

Thus, with the transfer of power clearly visible on the horizon, the dalit leaders in the provinces were now seeking new alliances and preferring merger with the Congress mainstream as the safest way to protect their interests. The masses, on the other hand, were sometimes swayed by the reformist Harijan movement, sometimes responded energetically to revoluntionary communist slogans. In other words, dalit politics at the grassroots level had dramatically changed in the last few years and these changes were amply reflected in the election results, with the Congress winning a landslide victory in the Scheduled Castes reserved seats. In a north Bengal constituency, a reserved seat went to a Communist dalit leader, indicating a different trend in political mobilization. And then, this near total rout of the Federation in the provincial elections was reflected in the composition of the Constituent Assembly, as it was elected by the members of the provincial legislatures. Among the 296 members of the Constituent Assembly, 31 belonged to the Scheduled Castes, of whom 29 were Congress nominees. One of them represented the Unionist Party and the only representative of the Federation was Ambedkar himself, elected from Bengal, with the help of Jogendranath Mandal, the president of the Bengal branch of the Federation,

[100] For details see Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, pp. 260–321.

[101] For details see Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, pp. 173–237.

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one or two independent Scheduled Caste MLAs and 'one or perhaps two Anglo-Indian votes in addition'.[102]

This crisis of representation also led to the crisis of patronage, and Ambedkar could easily foresee that it was coming. On the eve of the arrival of the Cabinet Mission, in a sensational press statement to a British newspaper, he warned the Attlee Government 'against the betrayal of the 60 million Scheduled Castes of India in order to appease the Caste Hindus'.[103] The Working Committee of the Federation in a meeting on 2 April also adopted a resolution specifying their demands before the Cabinet Mission. India should be made a self-governing country, the resolution stated, 'in a manner which . . . [would] not merely grant freedom to the Hindu majority but will also free the minority communities and the Scheduled Castes in particular from the tyranny of the majority community . . .'. The 'results of the Primary elections', it further reiterated, had 'conclusively proved' that the Federation was the 'only organisation' which could 'claim to speak for the Scheduled castes of India'. To safeguard their interests in future, the resolution demanded three 'fundamental' conditions to be provided for and they are: '(1) the provision for separate electorates; (2) provision for adequate representation in the Legislature, in the Executive and in the Services and (3) provision for new and separate settlements'.[104]

Dr Ambedkar first met the Cabinet delegation as a Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council on 26 March 1946, when he reiterated the necessity of adequate safeguards for the protection of minority rights, to be designed by the minorities themselves, and not by the Congress, which represented the majority community.[105] During his subsequent meeting on 5 April, as a representative of the Scheduled Caste Federation, he was more candid about such safeguards. Before the British left, he argued, 'they must ensure that the new constitution guaranteed to the Scheduled Castes the elementary human rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness',

[102] Note by Under Secretary of State, IOR: L/P&J/10/50. Ambedkar's biographer Dhananjay Keer, however, thinks that he was elected with the help of the Muslim League. See his *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission*, p. 382.

[103] *Dawn*, 20 March 1946, Paper-clipping in Ambedkar Papers, File Nos. 1–3, NMML.

[104] Resolution of the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Castes Federation passed at its meeting held in Delhi on 2nd April 1946. IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[105] Note of meeting between Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy's Executive Council on Tuesday, 26 March 1946, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, p. 9.

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and gave them the other safeguards they demanded. Of them, the separate electorates were fundamental. He would not prefer a Constituent Assembly either, for it would obviously be dominated by the caste Hindus.[106] Sir P. T. Rajan, the representative of the Justice Party, also supported this demand for separate electorate for the dalits, as without it, given the results of the recent elections, 'the Scheduled Castes did not stand a chance'.[107]

But it was during this time that the colonial government changed its views on the question of representation and patronage. Unlike the earlier occasion in 1942, when Cripps refused to see the members of the Congress-supported Depressed Classes League, this time the Cabinet delegation agreed to the request of the Congress president, Abul Kalam Azad, to meet the representatives of the 'Nationalist Scheduled Castes or Congress Scheduled Castes', along with the 'Nationalist Muslims'.[108] The delegation consisted of Jagjivan Ram, Radhanath Das and Prithvi Singh Azad, who presented a Memorandum passed at a recent meeting of the Working Committee of the League. It claimed, first of all, that the election results, 'proved beyond doubt the unrepresentative character of the Federation, and showed that the majority view of the Scheduled Castes was represented by the All India Depressed Classes League'. Jagjivan Ram further reiterated that 'the Scheduled Caste masses considered themselves Hindus', and that 'their main disability was not religious or social, but economic'.[109]

The Cabinet Mission also agreed with Ram. During their 5 April meeting with Ambedkar, Lord Pethic-Lawrence had bluntly told him that after the British had left India, the 'party divisions would probably be on economic issues. Surely the Scheduled Castes would have a better chance of getting their rights by allying themselves with the left wing than by relying on the British who were about to hand over

[106] Meeting between the Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Friday, 5 April 1946 at 12 Noon, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, pp. 144–7.

[107] Note of Meeting between Sir S. Cripps, Mr. Alexander and Sir P. T. Rajan on Wednesday 17 April 1946, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, pp. 289–90.

[108] Record of Meeting between Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell, and Maulana Azad on Wednesday, 3 April 1946 at 10 am, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, p. 116; also, 'Notes for meeting with other Representatives of the Depressed Classes', IOR: L/P&J/10/26.

[109] Meeting between the Cabinet Delegation and Mr. Jagjivan Ram, Mr. Radhanath Das and Mr. Prithvi Singh Azad on Monday 8 April 1946 at 4 pm, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, pp.170–1.

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power'.[110] This shifting of colonial patronage at the final hour of departure was also apparent in a note by G. E. B. Abell, the private Secretary to the Viceroy:

> We should not encourage minorities still to look to us. . . . we are in no position to uphold them if they take a stand against the great majority of their fellow citizens; e.g., we should do only harm in the long run by trying to insist now on separate electorates for the Scheduled Castes as demanded by the Ambedkarites. The treatment to be accorded to the minorities must be left to the Constituent Assembly and the responsibility of that body should not be blurred.[111]

This colonial mindset was formally revealed in May 1946 in the Statement of the Cabinet Mission. It said that for the purposes of electing the representatives of the Constituent Assembly, it was 'sufficient to recognise only three main communities in India, General, Moslem and Sikh, the "General" Community including all persons who are not Moslems or Sikhs'. The interests of the smaller minorities, such as the Scheduled Castes, would be looked after by an 'Advisory Committee on the rights of citizens, minorities and tribal and excluded areas', which would have due representation of such interests.[112] The position was further clarified on 18 July, when Sir Stafford Cripps announced before the House of Commons that there were 'two claimants to represent' the Depressed Classes. Of them, 'Dr. Ambedkar's organisation . . .[was] somewhat local in its character, being mainly centred in Bombay and the Central Provinces; the Congress affiliated organisation . . . [was] spread widely over the whole country'.[113] The Secretary of State conceded in the House of Lords on the same day, that 'owing to the operation of what is known as the Poona Pact, they [Ambedkar's party] have been almost entirely excluded from the provincial assemblies', and therefore could not secure representation in the Constituent Assembly. But the Depressed Classes, he reassured the House, would be having 'their full representation through the Congress affiliated organisation', whose leaders were interviewed and he was 'fully convinced

[110] Meeting between the Cabinet Delegation, Field Marshal Viscount Wavell and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on Friday, 5 April 1946 at 12 Noon *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, pp. 146–7.

[111] Note by G. E. B. Abell, 8 June 1946; IOR: 3/1/131.

[112] INDIA (Cabinet Mission), Statement by the Cabinet Mission and His Excellency the Viceroy, Presented by the Prime Minister to parliament . . . May 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/23.

[113] Text of the speech by Sir Stafford Cripps at the Commons on July 18, 1946, GI,Home (Political) File No. 51/2/1946, NAI.

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of their very genuine and strong desire to support the case of the Depressed Classes'. The proposed Advisory Committee on the Minorities, he hoped, would provide for reasonable opportunities for representing both the organizations.[114]

In the proposed Interim government too, the Scheduled Castes were to be represented by the Congress. In a letter to Wavell on 3 May 1946, Ambedkar had demanded that 'their representation in the interim Government should be 50% of the representation granted to the Muslims'.[115] But the Viceroy, on the other hand, proposed the formation of a Council with 12 portfolios, consisting of 5 Congress, including 1 Scheduled Caste, 5 Muslim League, 1 Sikh and 1 Anglo-Indian or 1 non-League Muslim.[116] The Congress president objected to the inclusion of the Scheduled Caste representation in the Congress quota, as that would reduce the caste Hindu representation.[117] The Viceroy thereafter proposed to include one Congress Scheduled Caste member over and above the five Congress members[118] and wrote to the Congress president that the Interim Government would be constituted 'on the basis of Political Parties and not Communities'. And six Congressmen to five Muslim Leaguers could not be called 'parity'.[119] Jinnah objected to the Scheduled Caste member being a Congress nominee. This was a device, he argued, not to give real representation to the Scheduled Castes, but to give an additional seat to the Congress.[120] Pethic-Lawrence also regretted that a member of the Ambedkarite Depressed Classes could not be included in the Interim Government. Interestingly, the Viceroy comforted him by saying that although he sympathized with his views, 'there was great difficulty in finding a competent administrator

[114] Lords Debate on India: Text of Secretary of State's Speech, GI, Home (Political), File No. 51/2/1946, NAI.

[115] Ambedkar to Wavell, 3 May 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[116] Record of Meeting between the Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell on Friday, 3 May 1946 at 2.30pm, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, p. 403.

[117] Record of meeting of Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell with Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru on Monday, 10 June 1946 at 12 noon, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, p. 856.

[118] Telegram from Cabinet Delegation and Viceroy to Prime Minister, Index 70, 14 June 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/23.

[119] Telegram from Cabinet Delegation to Cabinet Offices, Index 75, 15 June 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/23.

[120] Note of Interview between Mr Jinnah, Lord Pethic-Lawrence and Mr Alexander on Monday, 17 June 1946, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, pp. 960–1; also, Telegram from Cabinet Delegation to Cabinet Offices, Index 78, 20 June 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/23.

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among the followers of Dr. Ambedkar'. Strangely enough, only a year ago he had no hesitation in recommending Ambedkar as a possible member of his proposed new Executive Council. The First Lord then urged that at least they should be included among the 12 members of the Advisory Committee on the Minorities.[121]

As for the composition of the Advisory Committee, it was originally intended that its members would be elected by the Constituent Assembly. To this Ambedkar wrote an angry rejoinder to V. P. Menon, arguing that in such an arrangement, all the Scheduled Caste members of the Committee would 'represent the Congress point of view' and there would be no one to represent the Federation, although the results of the primary elections provided 'incontrovertible proof' of the latter's representative character.[122] The Cabinet Mission ultimately accepted the formula suggested by Menon, of 3 Hindus, 3 Muslims, 2 Scheduled Castes, 1 Sikh, 1 Indian Christian, 1 Anglo-Indian and 1 Parsi, who were to be elected, in addition to 20 co-opted members.[123] Among the co-opted members at least 6 would be Scheduled Castes, of whom two should represent the Scheduled Caste Federation.[124]

The composition of the Interim Government ran into further trouble, when in addition to the demand for inclusion of Congress Muslims, Maulana Azad also objected to the Viceroy's proposal to consult the Muslim League in filling up future vacancies in the Scheduled Caste seat. The Viceroy's contention, he argued, restricted the Congress representation to Caste Hindus alone and made it equal to that of the League.[125] Finally, on 16 July the Viceroy recommended that the proposed Interim Government would consist of fourteen members, of whom six members, including a representative of the Scheduled Castes, would be nominated by the Congress, five by the Muslim League and the three representatives of the

[121] Record of the Meeting of Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell on 18 June 1946 at 10 am, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, p. 968.

[122] Ambedkar to Menon, 19 June 1946; IOR: R/3/1/131.

[123] Record of the Meeting of Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell on 21 June 1946 at 10 am, *The Transfer of Power*, vol. VII, p. 998; also, V. P. Menon to G. E. B. Abell, 19 June 1946 and 20 June 1946, IOR: R/3/1/131.

[124] Memorandum on the Advisory Committee on the Rights of Citizens, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas; IOR: R/3/1/131.

[125] Record of the meeting of the Cabinet Delegation and Field Marshal Viscount Wavell with Representatives of the Congress Party on Sunday, 23 June 1946 at 2 pm., *The Transfer of Power*, Vol. VII, pp. 1012–18; Telegram from Cabinet Delegation to Cabinet Offices, Index 80, 25 June 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/23.

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minorities would be nominated by the Viceroy himself.[126] Jinnah opposed straight away, as the proposal broke the principle of parity and also let down the Scheduled Castes.[127] Nehru, on the other hand, agreed to send a provisional list of nominees, which included the name of Jagjivan Ram, representing the Scheduled Castes.[128] In the new government Ram received the portfolio of Labour,[129] ironically, the same one held by Ambedkar in the previous Executive Council.

Thus Ambedkar and his All India Scheduled Castes Federation were denied the right to represent the Scheduled Castes in any of the public fora, except the Minority Commission, primarily because of their debacle in the recent election. The election results, in other words, became the chief criterion for determining the legitimacy of representation. Ambedkar was indeed caught in his own trap. In a letter to Kamalakant Chitre in 1944 he wrote that he was researching on the question: 'Does the Congress Represent the Untouchables?' His method to answer this question, he said, would be to compile 'the number of votes Congress secured all throughout India against non-Congress Parties ... in the elections of 1937'. When a year later in 1945 his book (*What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*) appeared, chapter 6 did exactly that. It analysed the results of the election of 1937 and concluded that the Congress claim to represent all the communities of India was 'A False Claim'. Ironically, a year later the same argument was used against him. Although for Ambedkar the meaning of representation had now shifted from being 'electoral' to 'substansive', the colonial mind had moved in exactly the reverse direction.

The Response

The response of Ambedkar and the Federation to the Cabinet Mission decisions was predictably very bitter. The Working Committee of the Federation met on 4 June at Bombay and demanded an immediate amendment to the Cabinet Mission proposals. 'Failing this', the committee warned, 'there will be no alternative for the Sched-

[126] Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 16 July 1946, Wavell Collection, Vol. 7, pp. 34–5.
[127] Jinnah to Viceroy, 31 July 1946, Wavell Collection, Vol. 7, p. 75.
[128] H. E. the Viceroy's Interview with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on 17th August 1946, Wavell Collection, Vol. 7.
[129] Press Note, 1 Sept. 1946, Wavell Collection, Vol. 8, p. 169.

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uled Castes but to resort to direct action'.[130] Then, in a letter to Clement Attlee on 1 July, Ambedkar argued that until the Simla conference in 1945, the colonial government did recognize the Scheduled Castes as separate from the Hindus and considered them to be a distinct and important element in the national life of India and therefore the Viceroy invited separate representatives from the Federation. But the 'Cabinet Mission have completely effaced the Scheduled Castes as a separate entity'. So 'in the name of the Untouchables', he appealed to the Labour government to amend the proposals to recognize them as a minority, provide adequate safeguards for their rights before leaving India and to offer them at least two positions in the Interim government.[131] But when there was no response within a week, P. N. Rajbhoj, the general secretary of the Federation announced in a press statement on 9 July that: 'The time has arrived to launch a passive resistance movement . . . The circumstances require a struggle in order to save the Scheduled castes from the impending catastrophe'. He also alleged that the Cabinet Mission decisions were the results of Congress machinations.[132] The movement had already been informally launched on 26 June when the All India Congress Committee met at Bombay to ratify the Working Committee's resolutions on the Cabinet Mission proposals. The members of the Scheduled Caste Federation staged a demonstration outside the hall. However, no major disturbances of the proceedings occurred at that time.[133]

The satyagraha actually began on 15 July when the Bombay Legislative Council met at Poona. Defying the prohibitory orders of the District Magistrate, hundreds of Federation demonstrators, including some women, marched towards the Council Chamber, while shouting slogans and waving black flags. On being stopped by the police, they squatted on the road, while others, who could infiltrate through the cordon, were arrested. It was reported that in order to carry on the demonstration, volunteers were recruited from Bombay city and neighbouring districts and were being taken to Poona.[134]

[130] The All India Scheduled Caste Federation. Resolutions passed at the Meeting of the Working Committee held at Bombay on 4th June 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[131] Ambedkar to Attlee, 1 July 1946; IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[132] News from India: Political Situation, Section No. 15, Serial No. 96, 16 July, 1946, GI, Home (Political), File No. 51/2/1946, NAI.

[133] Fortnightly Report on the political situation in Bombay for the first half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/1946 Poll(I), NAI.

[134] Fornightly Report for Bombay for the first half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/1946 Poll(I), NAI.

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Two days later at a press conference on 17 July, Ambedkar announced that the movement would eventually become country-wide and would assume the 'same form of the struggle launched by the Congress in August 1942'. This was, as he explained further, 'a protest against the breaking of every sort of promise given to the Scheduled Castes by the British Government during the last 20 years'. So the movement would go on until they were accorded the status of a minority and would take probably 'a much more violent form'. He made it clear, though, that: 'We like this country to progress as much as anybody else does. ... All we want is that our position is safeguarded in the future India.' To ensure that, after the present Assembly session was over at Poona, the movement would spread to other parts of the country and would take different forms. But when asked whether or not he himself intended to offer satyagraha personally, he retorted: 'It is not necessary for a general to be present on the battlefield. I have got trusted lieutenants who look after the struggle ...'.[135]

A few days later on 21 July at another press conference at Poona, Ambedkar changed his target and directed his attack at the Congress and demanded from it an open declaration of policies on how it planned to safeguard the interest of the 60 million Scheduled Castes in the future constitution of India. The movement would not take place in the Muslim provinces of Punjab and Bengal, he declared, as the Muslims had already acknowledged their demands. And angrily repudiating a claim that the present agitation was motivated by a sense of frustration, he retorted that in the last election the Scheduled Castes 'had won cent per cent victory, although they had lost cent per cent seats'. It was the Poona Pact which was responsible for the disenfranchisement of the 60 million untouchables and therefore they now demanded its abrogation. The present satyagraha, he claimed, had been conducted 'on a high moral plane'; but when the moral resources would be exhausted, they would have recourse to 'other means'. Before leaving Poona, the same evening he addressed a largely attended public meeting of the dalits where he declared that the struggle would be continued to 'the bitterest end'.[136] The demonstration went on throughout the Assembly session and processions of satyagrahis numbering from five hundred to one

[135] News from India: Political Situation, Section No. 15, Serial No. 97, 23 July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 51/2/46, NAI.
[136] *Ibid.*

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thousand were taken out daily. Towards the end of the session, 1,119 satyagrahis were arrested and prosecuted.[137]

The movement gradually also spread to other provinces. In UP, Ambedkar's supporters tried to break up a Congress meeting at Lucknow on 24 June and from 15 July launched a satyagraha against the Cabinet Mission, the Congress and the Poona Pact. When the Legislative Assembly commenced its session on 16 July, demonstrations were held outside the Council Chambers and about 250 people were arrested for defying prohibitory orders.[138] In the Central Provinces and Berar, on 18 July about 10,000 Mahars, under a Federation banner, staged a demonstration at Nagpore in front of the Assembly Hall, when the Assembly was in session. Black flags were waived and anti-Congress slogans were shouted. It was followed by a public meeting, where speakers lamented how the loyalty of the Mahars during the Quit India movement was rewarded by the Cabinet Mission by completely overlooking the claims of the Scheduled Castes. The meeting expressed its no-confidence in the men elected to the Constituent Assembly, demanded the abrogation of the Poona Pact and appealed for volunteers for the non-violent satyagraha to be launched in Nagpore.[139] The Madras Scheduled Caste Federation also contemplated starting a satyagraha movement similar to the one started in Poona. At a public meeting on 28 July, N. Sivaraj, the President of the organization, was urged to take necessary steps towards that goal.[140]

But then on the same day, i.e., 28 July, the Poona satyagraha was 'adjourned', within less than a fortnight after its commencement. The reason cited by the Satyagraha Committee was the sudden adjournment of the Legislative Assembly session by the Congress ministry, which made demonstration in front of the Council chamber meaningless.[141] Ambedkar engaged in inconclusive negotiations with Sardar Patel and the Bombay Chief Minister S. K. Patil. When the talks failed, there was again another demonstration before the AICC

[137] Fortnightly Report for Bombay for second half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/1946 Poll(I), NAI.

[138] Fortnightly Report for UP for the first half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/1946, NAI.

[139] Fortnightly Report for Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/1946, NAI.

[140] Fortnightly Report for Madras for second half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) file No. 18/7/1946, NAI.

[141] News from India: Political Situation, Section No. 15, Serial No. 98, 30 July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 51/2/1946, NAI.

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meeting at Wardha on 8 August; but nothing further happened.[142] Ambedkar's earlier threat of extending the movement to other areas in such a contingency did not take effect either and he missed the opportunity of proving, through direct action, his popular support. This happened despite the fact that dalits everywhere had become articulate, even militant, as their relations with caste Hindus had been continually deteriorating in the recent past.

Prior to the launching of the Poona satyagraha, tension was mounting between the dalits and caste Hindus in other parts of Maharashtra. After about a month of respite, there was a reported renewal of trouble between the two groups at Tarwadi in Mazagaon on 2 July, leaving 30 people injured and a curfew order promulgated.[143] To cite a few other examples, the dalits of Orissa, who celebrated Ambedkar's birthday in Cuttack with great fanfare on 14 April, accused the Congress in an open meeting of being 'a capitalist organisation'.[144] In UP we come across signs of even more growing militancy among the dalits, particularly among the Chamars. The Commissioners of Meerut and Bareilly both reported in July an increase of tension between them and the caste Hindus, like the Rajputs, Gujars and Jats. In Saharanpur, the Chamars refused to cultivate land unless they were paid adequate wages; in Pilbhit they refused to carry dead bodies from Police Stations for post mortem examination. The caste Hindus also retaliated: in Saharanpur they refused to allow the Chamars to graze their cattle or cut wood. In a village in Muzaffarpur district, a large number of Gujars attacked a Chamar colony, leaving one dead and 70 injured. In Badaun two people were killed in a clash between Chamars and Thakurs.[145] It was against this backdrop of inter-caste tension that the Satyagraha of 15 July was launched in Lucknow.

In Nagpore the situation was even more tense. Here, a fracas between the local Mahars and the Textile Workers' Union resulted in a serious riot on 12 April, the day on which the election for the Nagpore Trade Labour Union constituency was taking place. Although trouble was initially controlled by the police, rumour

[142] Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, p. 383.

[143] Fortnightly Report for Bombay for the first half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/1946, NAI.

[144] The Orissa Report for the second half of April 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/4/1946, NAI.

[145] Fortnightly Report for UP for the first half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/46, NAI.

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spread in the afternoon that the dalit candidate for the constituency had been assaulted by two police constables. In response, a large crowd of Mahars, armed with spears and lathis attacked a police party and when the latter opened fire, one person was killed.[146] Soon the tension spread to Pulgaon, where a caste Hindu was stabbed by a Mahar youth, and to Bhandara district, and continued for more than a month.[147] It was again rekindled by the middle of July when the Mahars of Akola, armed with sticks and spears, participated in a procession that ended in a meeting where Gandhi and the caste Hindus were profusely abused. The tension that was gradually building up culminated in the Nagpore rally before the Assembly Hall on 18 July, which we have mentioned earlier.[148] But before it could proceed any further, the movement itself was withdrawn. What appears from this picture is the fact that the Scheduled Caste Federation had failed to channel this growing anger of the dalits into an organized mass movement, which alone at that critical juncture of Indian history could again establish the legitimacy of its representative character. The failure was partly due to a lack of experience in organizing a mass movement, and partly because of the absence of an adequate organizational machinery that could co-ordinate such an agitation across the vast subcontinent.

So it took about two months for the movement to be renewed again and in the meanwhile the Interim Government had taken office, with Jagjivan Ram representing the dalits in the new cabinet. The government believed that the threat of agitation by Ambedkar's Federation was unlikely to 'assume significant proportion'. The Federation had asked its members to renounce government titles in protest and only N. Sivaraj was reported to have renounced his title of Dewan Bahadur.[149] On a grander scale, however, the Scheduled Caste Federation of CP and Berar launched a satyagraha in Nagpore on 2 September, as the Central Provinces Legislative Assembly resumed its postponed budget session. Initially the *modus operandi* was to bring in batches of three to ten people into the Assembly Chamber

[146] Fortnightly Report for the Central Provinces and Berar for the first half of April 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/4/1946, NAI.

[147] Fortnightly Report for the Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of April 1946 and first half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/4/1946 and 18/7/46, NAI.

[148] Fortnightly Report for the Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of July 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/7/46, NAI.

[149] Government of India, Information and Arts Department, to Secretary of State for India, 30 Aug. 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/104.

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for shouting anti-government and anti-Congress slogans and courting arrest. When the Chamber was cordoned off, the satyagraha deteriorated into a series of violent demonstrations involving young people, and also some women, who were brought from the neighbouring districts to participate in the demonstration. Daily arrests ranged between one and four hundred, culminating in the police resorting to a lathi-charge on 18 September to disperse the crowd. And while this was going on outside the Council Chamber, inside, the Congress Harijan MLA was condemning the sinister motives of the Federation in organizing the satyagraha and the Congress Minister for Information was paying tribute to the Magistrate and the police for showing tact and forbearance in tackling the situation.[150]

The movement, however, continued for another fortnight, during which altogether 7,777 people were arrested and were released subsequently. The policy of releasing the prisoners in the evening was changed when on 26 September some of the released prisoners became unruly. In the following three days, 947 people, including 11 women, were arrested and were held in custody. Eventually, all but 180 sought release on signing personal bonds. Those who preferred to remain in jail were the top leaders, like Rao Bahadur G. M. Thaware or Dashrath Patil.[151] But although the Nagpore satyagraha thus died down, tension in other parts of the province continued for some time. In November, three Mahar boys in Pulgaon were reported to have assaulted a Brahman boy for apparently no reason. Then on the *dasehra* day, the photos of Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, which were being carried in a procession, were seized by some Mahar boys and torn into pieces. A few days later some Mahars clashed with a section of caste Hindu workers in a local mill and the officials blamed it on 'the recent spate of speech making' by the Federation leaders in the vicinity. Even this sporadic tension gradually calmed down, and so when in late November the Congress Harijan MLAs held a convention in Pulgaon with Jagjivan Ram in the chair, there was no hostile demonstration to break the tranquillity of the place.[152]

[150] Fortnightly Report for the Central Provinces and Berar for the first half of Sept. 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/9/46, NAI.

[151] Fortnightly Report for the Central Provinces and Berar for the second half of Sept. 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/9/46, NAI.

[152] Fortnightly Report for the Central Provinces and Berar for the first and second half of November 1946, GI, Home (Political) File No. 18/11/1946, NAI.

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When his lieutenants were fighting on the ground, Ambedkar was trying his old method of arguing his case once again before the British government. He wrote a long Memorandum on the 'Cabinet Mission and the Untouchables', in which he outlined what he thought the most obvious flaws in the Cabinet Mission statement. The first blatant mistake was of course the non-recognition of the untouchables as 'a separate and distinct element in the national life of India'. This was a 'serious departure' from the policies pursued so far by the government with regard to the untouchables. The other 'great mistake' was to adopt the results of the election as the sole criterion for 'assessing the representative character of the Congress'. The election was fought on the issue of independence, not the future constitution of India. And then again, the results of the final election were 'beyond the control of the Untouchables', because the great majority of them were not voters. On the contrary, in the Primary election, 'only 20 percent of the votes polled . . . were cast in favour of Congress and 72 percent against it'. The untouchables could not put up candidates in all the constituencies because of their 'inability . . . to bear the expense of double election' and their relative inexperience in election management. And finally, the Cabinet Mission was wrong in thinking that Ambedkar's influence was confined only to Bombay and the Central Provinces. This could be proved by citing his election to the Constitutional Assembly from the Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly, where he 'topped the poll so far as the general seats were concerned, beating even Mr. Sarat Chandra Bose, the leader of the Congress Party'. This was the main content of a long letter which he sent to Clement Attlee on 12 August 1946,[153] in a bid to reopen his case and undo the damage done by the Cabinet Mission.

But Ambedkar was fighting a battle that had already been lost. In a confidential telegram to the Secretary of State, the Governor of Bengal described his statement as 'both incorrect and somewhat ingenuous'. Given the method of proportional representation with single transferable vote, each candidate in the Bengal legislature needed four votes to be elected to the Constituent Assembly. In the case of Ambedkar, he received five, the fifth one actually being wasted. The Congress whip, on the other hand, evenly distributed their votes. But actually Bose and one other Congress nominee got

[153] Ambedkar to Attlee, 12 Aug. 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

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five votes; so there was no question of Ambedkar beating him.[154] The British Government conceded that the present electoral system acted against the Scheduled Caste voters; but that did not explain why the Federation would not be able to field candidates in more than 22 seats only. 'When all is said', noted a confidential note, '... the figures do not support Dr Ambedkar's claim that his Federation commands a substantial majority of the Scheduled Caste voters in the country and is therefore the only body truly representative of the Scheduled Castes.'[155] The other reason for not upsetting the balance was of course the apprehension of Congress displeasure. The Secretary of State, therefore, wrote in his minute to the Prime Minister on 9 September 1946: 'I still feel that we should not volunteer a pronouncement in response to Dr Ambedkar's request for a public declaration that the Scheduled Castes are a minority ... To do so would almost certainly arouse a controversy with Gandhi ...'.[156]

So when Ambedkar went to London in October in order to persuade the Attlee government, its mind had already been cast. In the meanwhile, Jogendranath Mandal, a Scheduled Caste MLA from Bengal, a supporter of Ambedkar, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Federation, had been nominated to the Interim Government by Jinnah as a League representative. This was in retaliation to the Congress including a nationalist Muslim in its own quota. But in such circumstances, as the government thought, Ambedkar could 'hardly complain that the Scheduled Castes ... [were] insufficiently represented in the Interim Government'.[157] But Ambedkar had enough grounds for complaining, as Mandal seemed to be more keen on pleasing his patron than serving his community. In a press interview on 17 October, he said that his 'first duty' was to the Muslim League. 'Secondly' he would work for the whole country and only 'Thirdly' would he work for the betterment of the Scheduled Castes.[158] So Ambedkar in a press statement from London referred to his nomination as 'wet-nursing'. This was followed by a warning issued in India by P. N. Rajbhoj, the General Secretary of

[154] Confidential Code Telegram from Governor of Bengal to Secretary of State for India, 29 Aug. 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[155] Confidential Brief for Dr Ambedkar's visit to UK, 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[156] Secretary of State's Minute, Serial No. 51/46, 9 Sept. 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[157] Confidential Brief for Dr Ambedkar's visit to UK, 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

[158] Statement by Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Mandal: Information Department, India Office, Telegram A3563 from the Press Information Bureau, New Delhi, 18 October 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/50.

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the Federation, to recommence satyagraha in order to have separate electorates for the Scheduled Castes.[159] Ambedkar came back from London empty-handed, and on his return reiterated once again his demand for separate electorates and expressed his belief that the British parliament before transferring power would take steps to ascertain the wishes of the minorities, regardless of what happened in the Constituent Assembly. Rajagopalachari condemned him for his 'defeatist philosophy of segregation' and it received wide publicity, as the mood of the majority of the nation was changing fast, with the inaugural session of the Constituent Assembly drawing nearer.[160]

So the satyagraha was renewed again on 25 March 1947. This time the UP Scheduled Caste Federation started sending batches of protesters to demonstrate in front of the Council Chamber against the Congress Ministry and in demand for a separate electorate. Defiance of prohibitory orders resulted in arrests, which in the first four days rose to 196, including some women.[161] The movement in this way went on for fifteen days, resulting in the arrest of a number of front-ranking leaders. And then on 18 April, P. N. Rajbhoj himself led a batch of 75 passive resisters and courted arrest. On the eve of his arrest, he issued a press statement criticizing the Congress Ministry and alleging harassment of his community by the caste Hindus. About 550 passive resisters had been arrested already since the beginning of the movement.[162] But all these were of no avail as the satyagrahis were swimming against the dominant political tide. Their protest against the Congress at a time when the country was patiently waiting for transfer of power and freedom, was most likely to be misunderstood. The leaders of the Federation tried in vain to dispel the distrust of the nation, as it was evident from the following press statement of Piare Lal Kureel, a member from UP of the Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation. It was issued on 28 April, when the UP satyagraha was still on and Kureel was in prison.

It is wrong to think that the Scheduled Castes are against the Congress demand for political freedom or that they want to defeat the so-called pop-

[159] Government of India, Information and Broadcasting Department, to Secretary of State, 1 Nov. 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/104.

[160] Government of India, Information and Broadcasting Department, to Secretary of State, 21 Nov. 1946, IOR: L/P&J/10/104.

[161] *The Pioneer*, 26 March, 30 March 1947.

[162] *The Pioneer*, 19 Arpil 1947.

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ular Government. They are equally patriotic and democratic in their outlook. Their demands are just and are not opposed to the principles of social justice and constitutional democracy. I earnestly ask the Government to try to understand them.[163]

But the appeal was of no avail, as the mind of the majority of Indians had already been cast in a mould created by the transfer of power process. Rajbhoj was eventually sentenced to six months' imprisonment, which provoked a barrage of protests from various local Scheduled Caste organizations across the country.[164] But there was no protest or expression of sympathy from any other quarter. On the contrary, there was condemnation in the press that dalit leaders like Ambedkar were 'insincere' to the cause of 'freedom of India'.[165] This was in sharp contrast to the image of his adversary, Jagjivan Ram, the President of the Congress-affiliated All India Depressed Classes League, who had been telling the pressmen that it was incorrect to suggest that the Scheduled Castes were not Hindus and therefore entitled to special minority rights. He 'supported India's liberation movement because . . . unless foreign domination is liquidated, there can be no peace and prosperity in the country'. In widely shared popular perception, as opposed to Ambedkar's 'separatist' line, he appeared to be offering an 'assimilative organisation' and promising a future when untouchability would completely vanish and the gulf between the caste Hindus and the Scheduled Castes would be bridged.[166] Ram, who could thus purposefully blend his anti-colonialism with social welfarism, was thus more in tune with the mood of the day than his political opponent.

Reconciliation and After

It was, therefore, time for reconciliation. Now it was only through co-operation with the Congress and through his contributions to the

[163] *The Pioneer*, 28 April 1947.

[164] One could mention among them, the Rae Barali, Hamirpur and Jhansi district Scheduled Caste Federations in UP, dalit meetings in Chanda, Wardha, Yeotmal and Bhandara in C.P. and Berar, as well as Berar Provincial Scheduled Caste Federation. See letters from these organizations in GI, Reforms Office, File No. 41/10/47-R, Part I and Part II, NAI.

[165] From Prusottam Dass Kureel, General Secretary, UP Chamar Mahasabha, to Viceroy, nd, GI, Reforms Office File No. 41/26/47-R, NAI.

[166] News from India: Political Situation, Section No. 15, Serial No. 98, 30 July 1946, GI, Home (Political), File No. 51/2/1946, NAI.

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working of the Constituent Assembly that Ambedkar could serve his community. So from the end of the year 1946, the dalit representatives began to show greater friendliness towards the Congress and the Constituent Assembly, and there was also greater moderation in the proceedings of the Working Committee of the Scheduled Caste Federation. Ambedkar supported the part of Nehru's resolution which set out the Objectives of the Constituent Assembly.[167] And then on 17 December, while responding to Jayakar's amendment to Nehru's resolution, he delivered a remarkable speech which signified a total turn around:

> . . . I know to-day we are divided politically, socially and economically. We are in warring camps, and I am probably one of the leaders of a warring camp. But with all this I am convinced that given time and circumstances, nothing in the world will prevent this country from becoming one, and with all our castes and creeds, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that we shall in some form be a united people.[168]

His biographer Dhanajay Keer rightly observes: 'Few speeches have given such a turn to the life of a speaker.' It was indeed a significant day in the career of Ambedkar. 'The sacrileger had become now a counsel', Keer goes on, 'the scoffer had become a friend who cast a spell on the Congressmen'.[169]

Around this time Ambedkar was also reported to have met L. B. Bhopatkar, the President-elect of the Hindu Mahasabha, to discuss the possible means of 'effecting a rapprochement between caste Hindus and members of the Scheduled Castes'. The issue was going to be discussed in the forthcoming Gorakhpur session of the Mahasabha, for which Ambedkar supposedly conveyed 'certain proposals' to the Mahasabha leader.[170] The necessary background for this rapprochement was possibly provided by the series of social reforms that followed during this period, including a number of temples being opened for the dalits. The Congress also took on board an active legislative programme in various provinces for removing social disabilities for the dalits and for ensuring for them entry into the Hindu

[167] Government of India, Information and Broadcasting Department, to Secretary of State, 4 Feb. 1947, IOR: L.P&J/10/104.

[168] Quoted in *Jay Bheem* (Madras), 1 January 1947, Paper-clipping in Ambedkar Papers, File No. 1–3, NMML.

[169] Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, p. 389.

[170] *Jay Bheem* (Madras), 1 Jan. 1947, Paper-clipping, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 1–3, NMML.

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temples.[171] And finally, when Bengal was partitioned and Ambedkar lost his seat in the Constituent Assembly, the Congress offered him the seat from Bombay, vacated by Dr Jayakar in April. When in July he returned to Constituent Assembly, this time from Bombay with Congress support, he was greeted with loud cheers.[172] His subsequent appointment as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, and later as the Labour Minister in the first Nehru Cabinet, completed the reconiliation process.[173]

But reconciliation was doubtful from the very beginning and ran into rough waters within a few months. As he had apprehended earlier, it was difficult for Ambedkar to work with the champions of Hindu orthodoxy operating from within the Congress. By May 1948, his feud with Patel and Pant came into the open and he proposed to resign.[174] Ultimately, he resigned from the Cabinet in October 1951, owing to his irreconcilable differences with some of the Congress stalwarts over the Hindu Code Bill.[175] This was the final parting of the ways and also another major moment of crisis for dalit politics. The first election in independent India was approaching and the Congress was still being looked on as the liberator and therefore was sure to win. As long as Ambedkar was in the Cabinet, the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee was considering the idea of having an electoral alliance with his Scheduled Caste Federation.[176] This would have certainly ensured success for its candidates in the coming election. But the moment he resigned, the whole scenario changed. Not only was the alliance called off, but the Congress now decided to put up a candidate against him and proposed to mobilize all the

[171] Among the achievements of Congress around this time, one could mention the Orissa Removal of Civil Disabilities Act, 1946, Madras Temple Entry Authorisation Act, 1947, Madras Removal of Civil Disabilities (Amendment) Act, 1947, the United Provinces Removal of Social Disabilities Act, 1947, etc. The texts of these acts may be found in GI, Home (Political), File Nos. 13/3/47, 13/5/47, 13/8/47, 13/12/47, NAI.

[172] Government of India, Information and Broadcasting department, to Secretary of State, 19 July 1947, IOR: L/P&J/10/104.

[173] His biographer Dhananjay Keer thinks that his inclusion in the cabinet was due to the intervention of Sardar Patel, S. K. Patil, Acharya Donde and Nehru. Gandhi only gave his assent when the proposal was presented before him by Nehru. See *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, pp. 396, 439.

[174] Ambedkar to Kamalakant Chitre, 5 May 1948, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Papers, NAI.

[175] For a detailed discussion of Ambedkar's differences with the Congress at this stage, see Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission*, pp. 426–36.

[176] Bombay State Election Co-ordination Committee, Draft Minutes of the meeting of July 30 [1951], Bombay P.C.C. Papers, Subject Files No. 9, NMML.

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resources necessary to ensure his defeat. Ambedkar accepted the challenge, decided to contest the election from the Bombay Parliamentary constituency and asked Kamalakant Chitre to 'set up an organisation'.[177]

The election campaign of 1951 is important for understanding dalit politics of this period and of the recent past. At an election meeting at Jullunder on 27 October 1951, Ambedkar explained his relationship with the Congress during the four years of his ministerial career. 'I remained independent while in the Congress Government', he declared. 'Many people thought that I had joined the Congress Party as I had accepted the Cabinet Ministership of the Congress Government'. But, 'earth and stone are two different things', he added, 'and they can never mix together'. He did not join the Congress Party because he thought it was never a party with genuine sympathy for the Scheduled Caste people.[178] Such bitterness and sense of frustration even after more than four years of close co-operation from within the cabinet is worth a serious consideration. It shows clearly that the alliance was never a happy one and not without conflict, as became evident with the row over the Hindu Code Bill. And the frustration was also natural, as barring the constitutional prohibition of untouchability and the provision of reservation, no other tangible steps had been taken for the protection of the dalits. 'Had there been any possibility of getting our grievances redressed in the Congress, I would not have left the organisation', he declared at another meeting the following day at Ludhiana. But why, in the first place, did he join the Congress cabinet and resign subsequently? Was it for personal ambitions alone, as alleged recently by Arun Shourie?[179] What Ambedkar said in this regard at the same Ludhiana meeting is worth pondering:

> If I wanted I could remain in the Congress for ever and would have definitely got a good place there. But I would have done only if I had selfish motives and not any regard for my community. I would have remained there, if I was in need of any licence or permit for myself. The man seeking licences and permits can do so at the expense of his community. This is the

[177] Ambedkar to Kamalakant Chitre, 23 Oct. 1951, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Papers, NAI.

[178] Speech delivered by Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on 27th October 1951 at Ramdass Pur, Jullunder during his Tour of Punjab (I), Ambedkar Papers, File Nos. 1–3, NMML.

[179] Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods*, pp. 56–8.

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experience I have gained during the period I remained in the Congress Government.[180]

The next day at another meeting at Patiala he reiterated the same argument. 'Had I wished, I would have continued as a Minister in the Government for the whole of my life but I have no selfish motives. So I have left the Congress Government as I think I cannot serve my community while remaining there.' It is difficult to deny the obvious truth in Ambedkar's statements. The Congress government, he believed, had failed to deliver the goods. There was 'no food, no clothes and no shelter' for the poor people. The condition of the dalits had deteriorated under its regime. The reservation was only for ten years. He wanted it to remain until untouchability was totally eradicated; but that did not happen because of Congress opposition. And so, when the reservation would be gone, he apprehended, the caste Hindus would again call the dalits 'Chamars and Bhangis'. So it was absolutely necessary for them to unite under the banner of the Scheduled Caste Federation.[181]

But the election was fought on entirely different issues. Congress was still the liberator, the only champion of a triumphant Indian nationalism, and therefore it swept the elections in 1952.[182] Out of 489 Lok Sabha seats, Congress won 364, while Ambedkar could only see his lieutenant P. N. Rajbhoj elected. The Federation also got one seat in the Bombay Assembly and one in Hyderabad.[183] Ambedkar himself fared badly in the Bombay parliamentary consituency, being defeated by a political nonentity. He could not take the defeat very lightly. 'Either the voting has been manipulated', he wrote to Kamalakant Chitre, '. . . or that the Bombay city has genuinely voted for the Congress. If the latter is true it is a sad reflection on the intelligence of the Bombay citizens . . . The Bombay city seems to me to have become terribly degraded city.'[184] He thought of a conspiracy theory too: 'the plot to defeat me', he wrote again to Chitre four

[180] Speech delivered by Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on 28th October 1951 at Ludhiana during his tour of Punjab, Ambedkar Papers, File Nos. 1–3, NMML.

[181] Speech delivered by Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on 29th October 1951 at Patiala during his tour of Punjab, Ambedkar Papers, File Nos. 1–3, NMML.

[182] It is pertinent here to mention a proverb I remember from my childhood days in Calcutta in the 1960s. It said that even a lamp-post would win the election if it contested on a Congress ticket.

[183] Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods*, p. 58. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*, p. 440.

[184] Ambedkar to Kamalakant Chitre, 14 January 1952, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Papers, NAI.

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days later, 'was hatched by Dange and Savarkar who was inflamed by my proposal to partition Kashmir'.[185]

But his chief election agent, Kamalakant Chitre, was much more dispassionate in diagnosing the causes of this catastrophe. On the whole, he calculated, Ambedkar must have got not more than 60% of the Scheduled Caste votes, because 'many . . . were not voters and many being voters were not traceable'. The latter situation indicated another major weakness. The 'foremost' cause of defeat, as Chitre identified it, was 'the lack of organisation, capable of establishing contact with the voters outside the S. C. section'. In short, as he lamented: 'Our own organisation was a tattered one. Practically there is nothing except your name, but for which we would have been nowhere'.[186] But apart from organization, if we also look at the programme of the Federation, we would find that it had very little on offer to attract the masses. The Election Manifesto stated boldly that the Federation was not 'a communal organisation'; its major concern was 'the benefit of all the down-trodden humanity in India'. But for these people the kind of education it proposed was 'not primary education, not even Secondary education. What it ha[d] in mind . . . [was] advanced education of such high order, both in this country and outside, which . . . [would] enable these classes to fit themselves for taking hold of administration'. And as a complementary measure to this, it proposed reservation in all civil and military services, subject only to minimum qualification. The problem of poverty was diagnosed to be 'a double edged problem'. On the one hand, it was a problem of production in agriculture and industry, and on the other, a problem of 'excessive growth of population'. Interestingly, it was not considered to be a problem of distribution! 'The problem of landless labourers', the Manifesto suggested, 'could be solved by settling them in reclaimed waste land . . .'; the fifteen-page document contained no reference to land reform.[187] Such a programme could appeal to an emerging dalit middle class. But however much Ambedkar might criticize Congress for ignoring the masses, his election manifesto could hardly expect to become an alternative draw card

[185] Ambedkar to Kamalakant Chitre, 18 January 1952, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Papers, NAI.

[186] Unsigned letter [presumably from Kamalakant Chitre] to Ambedkar, 14 January 1952, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Papers, NAI.

[187] Election Manifesto of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation, Ambedkar Papers, File No. 3–9, Part 1, Roll No. 2, NMML. M. S. Gore, however, reads this Manifesto in a different way. See his *The Social Context*, pp. 190–3.

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for the mass of voters in an election based on universal adult franchise. These two limitations—that of organization and programme—were the perennial problems that haunted dalit politics ever since its inception. And it was these problems which ultimately precipitated its final crisis, threatening its autonomy, towards the end of the colonial era, notwithstanding the undoubted qualities and commitments of the leadership.

Conclusion

One major political result of the transfer of power in India was the marginalization, at least temporarily, of all other minority identities, except those defined by religion, such as the 'Moslem' or 'Sikh'. It also resulted in a hegemonic power of the Congress, which was bestowed with the privilege of representing all other Indians—the 'General' population. The Congress contested the minority constituencies as well and claimed to represent them all. Ambedkar and his All India Scheduled Caste Federation were helplessly caught in this paradigm. Although until 1945 the colonial state recognized them as a distinct community with claims to separate political rights and representation, the Cabinet Mission curtly told them to look towards the Congress for their future protection and welfare. To put it in a different way, the main thrust of the transfer of power process was to depoliticize caste and push it into the social or religious domain. This amounted indeed to a total negation of a powerful colonial discourse on caste developed since the late nineteenth century and an abrupt reversal of the erstwhile dominant trend in colonial policies on representation and franchise, followed since the early years of the twentieth. Ambedkar and other dalit leaders were hardly prepared for this sudden portentous shift and could do nothing to reverse this political process. They had to remain satisfied with only a token representation for their Federation in the Advisory Committee on the minorities, in a similar way as Jinnah had to remain content with a moth-eaten Pakistan.

But Ambedkar and the dalit leadership were also partly responsible for this predicament. The dismal state of their organizational network and the lack of a popular support base were pathetically revealed when they needed them most to establish their substantive representative character. Ambedkar's naïve hope that he would give

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a clarion call and people would mobilize,[188] did not actualize at times of need. To use his own analogy, his ill-equipped 'lieutenants' failed the 'general' at the crucial moment of crisis. Ambedkar himself had become detached from the ground realities of dalit politics. Ever since he became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, he had very little time for organizational work. This detachment increased, as the local dalit leaders complained, when he became a minister in the Nehru cabinet.[189] In the meantime, dalit politics, which never represented a united front, had started moving further in different directions.

From 1937 onwards, the Congress-supported Depressed Classes League had been specifically focusing on the mobilization of dalit voters at the grassroots level on the basis of an integrationist reform programme. However faulty that mobilization drive might have been, the result was a sweeping victory for the Congress Scheduled Caste candidates in the election of 1946. At the other end of the spectrum, in the 1940s, the Communists on a much more radical note were mobilizing the dalit poor peasants and sharecroppers in both eastern and southern India. As a result, the dalits became the major participants in two of the most violent peasant revolts of the late colonial period, the Tebhaga movement in Bengal[190] and the Telengana movement in Andhra.[191] In other words, when Ambedkar and his Federation were lobbying the British government for constitutional protection, the Congress and the Communists were gradually eroding their support base at the grassroots level.

This 'process of co-optation and incorporation' of the dalit movements throughout India, as Gail Omvedt has described the scenario,[192] was made possible, as one has to admit, by the absence of an alternative organization or programme, forthcoming from Ambedkar and his Federation. While Ambedkar was condemning the Congress for preaching conformity with its own ideology, he too was refusing to recognize the pluralist nature of dalit politics in the India of the

[188] Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, p. 315.

[189] *Ibid.*

[190] For more details, see, Adrienne Cooper, *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers' Struggles in Bengal 1930–1950* (Calcutta, 1988), *passim*; and Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India*, pp. 229–37.

[191] For more details see, D. N. Dhanagare, *Peasant Movements in India 1920–1950* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 180–212; Gail Omvedt, however, thinks that Marxist claims that the dalits constituted the 'main force' of the *dalams* are only 'examples of romanticism'. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, pp. 311–12.

[192] Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*, p. 326.

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1940s. This refusal left him ill-prepared to confront his adversaries politically, with an ideologically integrated alternative organization and a programme more appealing to the dalit masses. In the political environment of the time, when the dominant mood of the people and all other political parties was to achieve and enjoy the long-awaited freedom, any statement of concern for citizens' rights in a future state needed to be blended with anti-colonialism, in order to capture popular imagination. It was here that the dalit Federation failed and the result was the elimination of what Ambedkar imagined to be a viable third force in the troubled Indian politics of the 1940s.

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